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*The Gift of  
the late  
Prof. John Farrar, LL.D.,  
of Cambridge,  
by  
His Widow,  
Mrs. Eliza Farrar.  
Rec'd. Dec. 19,  
1853.*

THE  
**LIGHT OF TRUTH**  
IN THE MIND OF MAN,  
The only Rule of Faith and Practice.  
WITH SOME  
**OBSERVATIONS**  
UPON THE  
FORMALITY AND IDOLATRY  
OF  
**RELIGIOUS SECTS.**

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The wise man does not make courage to consist in  
conquering others, but in conquering himself.

*Le juste milieu.*

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Posthumous Gift

of  
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of  
Cambridge.

by his widow, Mrs. Eliza Farrar.

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## INTRODUCTION.

The following pages have been written under no feelings, which would lead me to take side in any party question; but the more the excellency and purity of divine truth has been opened, upon my understanding, the more I have witnessed its operations, separated not only from all the wars and conflicts which agitate the christian world, so called but from all the forms which sectarians have established. Under these ideas I offer a few sentiments to unbiassed and impartial minds; simply because it has appeared right to do so; extending to all, that perfect liberty of conscience, which would not wish to change the views of any man, though they might lead him to condemn every sentiment that I have advanced.

After a careful examination of different doctrines that have been maintained by learned and virtuous men, in different eras of the world, I have found that true religion does not consist in following books or men; but in taking for the rule of our lives the divine light in our own breasts. This I have exemplified by extracts from a few writers—by showing the uncertainty of the bible, as a standard of belief, and of every other outward rule of faith and practice.

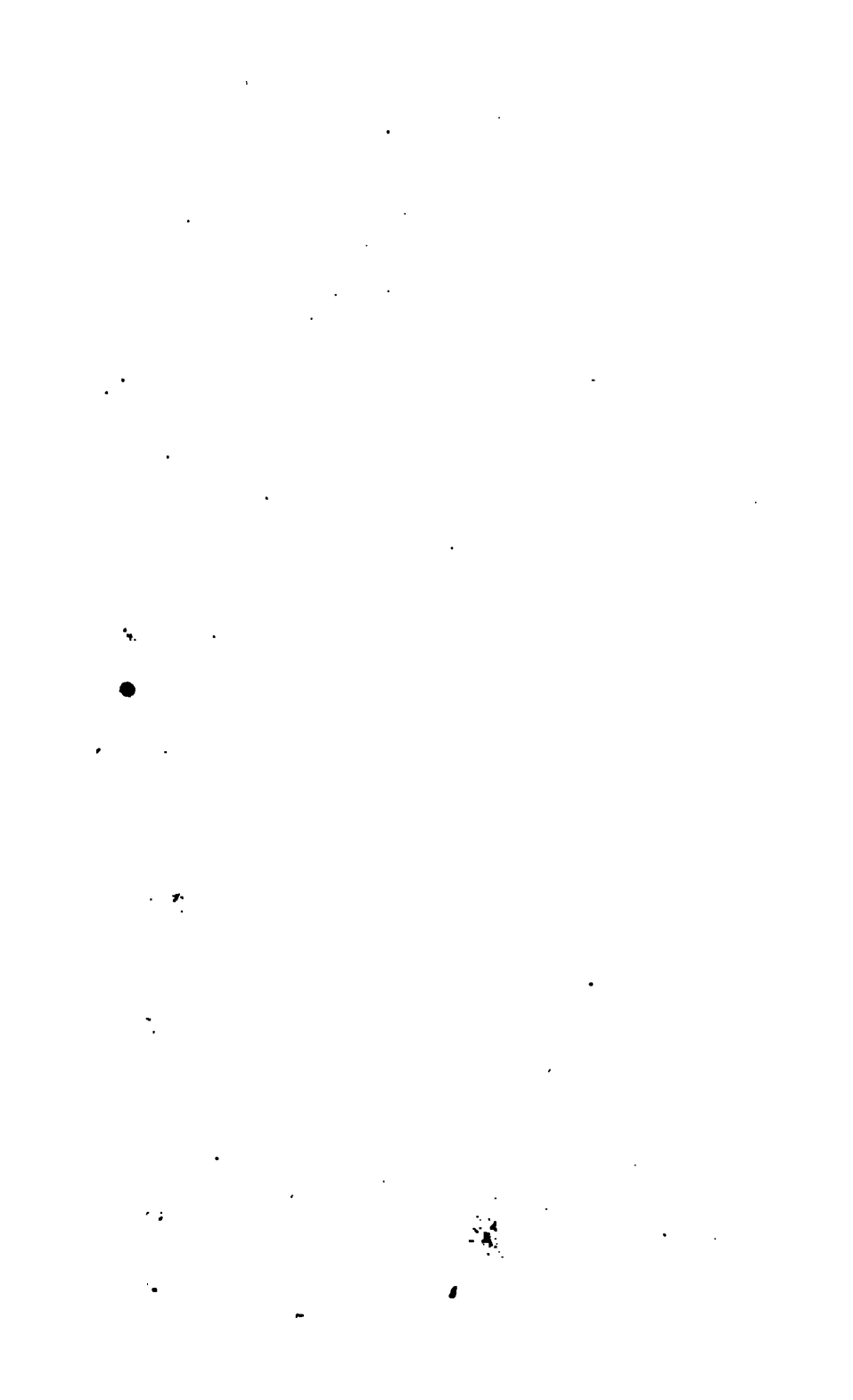
In treating upon the idolatry of sects, I have assumed, that men are not made better by a profession of religion, but by purity of heart; and that there is no essential difference, in the idolatry which in different countries makes religion consist in different outward ceremonies; which in one looks to a pagoda, a temple or a mosque; in others to a chapel, a church, or a meeting house; either as houses of God or places of worship. And singular as it may appear, it does seem to be the fact, that the pure doctrine of the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ, has been most clearly and publicly recognized among the Chinese and our American natives, living half the circumference of the globe from each other, and equally remote from the principal professing christians of the world.

Yet between these, and the professed followers of Jesus Christ, division lines are drawn. Because they have not the Bible, and do not know that Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem, they are called heathen nations! Is it right that this should be so? Is it right that men professing christianity, should keep alive divisions among themselves? These things, if consistent with the state men are in, are wholly irreconcilable with pure and vital religion. In the following pages I have endeavoured to show the total inefficacy of every form in religion: each sectarian will acknowledge it, as respects all that he is not in the practice of—but there he will stop. Free from sectarian bondage, I have drawn the full length picture—in the persuasion that there is a pure and

holy religion, in which, under feelings separated from sectarian views, the traditions of the Romanist, the Quaker, the Calvinist, the Unitarian, &c. will no longer mark boundaries between men; and this religion is altogether in that one eternal, unchangeable, indivisible Principle, to which I have referred, which applies to all mankind, which embraces every thing that is excellent in religion, which knows no sect among men or distinction between individuals; and though it may be true that many are not prepared for it, yet those who through the power of divine love embrace it, find all partition walls as perfectly broken down, as if all the world were subjected to it.

I have freely stated my feelings, I ask no one to adopt them, and presenting them without a name, they will stand simply upon their own merits or demerits.

THE AUTHOR.



## **CONTENTS.**

**The Light of Truth in the mind of man, the only rule of faith and practice, exemplified by its universality—acknowledged in different eras, by the Chinese, the Hindeos, ancient Philosophers and modern Indians—of the Bible—of the mission of Jesus Christ—of the Idolatry of Sects—of their written Rules and Forms—of the Spiritual Sabbath—of pure Religion.**

# CHAPTER I

THE first object of this work is to show that the  
principles of the science of politics are not  
the same as those of the science of law, and  
that the principles of the science of politics are  
not the same as those of the science of  
economics.

## THE LIGHT OF TRUTH, &c.

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There has been no period of latter time, in which so much agitation has prevailed in that portion of mankind calling itself by the name of Christ, as in the present age. Each society appears to be striving to disseminate that particular form of religion, which it deems right. Bible societies have multiplied, in many countries among every class of men, to spread the scriptures; they have been translated into various languages, and circulated among heathen nations.—Missionary societies have been established, and men have been educated and set apart for the express purpose of spreading the Gospel; and the piety of individuals is in some degree measured by their zeal and munificence in supporting these things.

I have no reason to doubt the integrity of many, who are devoting their time and their substance to what they think right; but I trust, I may, without giving offence, enter into the exa-

mination of the proper rule of life, for every man, the world over, by whatever name he may be called, whether Jew, Gentile, Christian, Pagan or Infidel; and if I should expose the formality and idolatry of sects, it will be under no feelings which would condemn them.

The knowledge of good and evil—the perception of right and wrong—beginning in childhood, and ripening with maturity of age, is what makes man a moral agent: as God himself, it is universal, omnipotent and eternal; acknowledged in every age, country and climate, among every description of men; so that amid all the discoveries of modern geographers, no people have yet been found without a knowledge of God.

Although the reality of moral obligation is universally admitted, yet there are some who consider it the result of education and habit—that men are dependant upon the Bible, and upon their fellow-men, for a rule of faith and conduct—others will believe with me, that this principle is nothing less than the impress of God upon the mind of man, given to him as a guide to direct his path. Those who by attending to it, have felt its power, have no need of being told, either that it is from God, or that nothing else can be the guide of their lives.

They know it from evidence which cannot be shaken ; so that were other men to deny it, their faith would not be moved, nor could it be increased, by any testimony that could be adduced in its favour.

Men can have no real faith in it, but by its operations in their own soul ; none can have a perfect faith in it, but those who are perfected by it ; if it has cast out only one sin, they may believe in its power to cast out every sin. But all who live under the power of it, have in every real sense a faith in it, whether they attribute it to God or man ; by whatever name they may call it, or whether they acknowledge it in words or not : so on the other hand, any outward profession of its existence, calling it by the most exalted names, amounts to no saving faith in it. That with a full knowledge that it is alone by the gift of God, that we are enabled truly to believe in it. I shall make a few observations addressed to those who are referring to the Bible, or other books, or to men for instruction ; showing that it has operated alike in every age of the world.

To attempt proof would be worse than useless : I appeal to no evidence that I might be able to collect, but to feeling, for the truth of my observations. And although I may make

some quotations from the Bible and other books, yet I do it with a view of giving words to my own feelings ; and as conveying the sentiments of the respective authors, rather than as attaching any authority to their particular doctrines. As I shall not attempt much more, than stating my own views and feelings, I shall not rely upon any proof to support them, but leave them to be examined, condemned or approved, as my readers may feel disposed.

If we are to deny every thing that cannot be demonstrated, we shall be led into a labyrinth of scepticism. The feelings of men are appealed to, in proof of the most common truths ; and philosophy has acknowledged their umpire, in questions which human reason has been unable to fathom.

That every man, in this life, owes a duty to God, is a truth so universally admitted, as to require no argument to elucidate it; and yet there are those, who, while they would deem the denial of it great impiety, do not scruple to affirm, that man is dependant upon his fellow-man to point out what this duty is. If people were unbiassed by tradition and education, we should probably find them as universally admitting that they knew their own proper duty, without the

aid of other men or books, as that there was a God on whom they are dependant.

If there are any who suppose that a vocal voice called to Adam in the garden, their feelings must be of a very carnal nature.

Personifying God, and giving him a local habitation, is a species of idolatry. I truly believe that every perception that Adam had of Deity, was similar to what each of his descendants has felt in every succeeding age of the world. If it were not so, the Almighty, beneficent Jehovah, has been partial to his creatures.

Man was created for happiness; and it was only the attempt to know good and evil for himself, or a departure from the eternal principle of Truth, that plunged our common parent into misery—he was allured by his lusts and fell.

Let us drop the allegorical picture of a local paradise—of an audible voice—of a material serpent—of visible trees and fruit—and we shall find his situation to resemble our own; we have our duty to perform as he had; the same guide to lead us to obedience to God; the same feelings attendant on a corporeal existence, to entice us; we seek for independence and we fall.

If we literally believe every account that is recorded in the scriptures, we shall credit the most palpable contradictions; they abound with

allegorical descriptions and parables; and of Jesus it is said, that "without a parablespeaketh he not to the multitude."\*

Similar modes of expression are often recorded in scripture, "the Lord said unto Cain, if thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted? If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."† There is not to be found an unbiassed individual, who has not heard this truth without a vocal voice; and he believes it, not because he has read it in scripture, or that his preceptor has told him of it, but because the voice of God has spoken to his own soul. The man who has never heard it can hardly be considered as an accountable creature.

Familiar language is most frequently resorted to in the scriptures, to represent the immediate converse of God with man. Abraham stood before the Lord and plead for Sodom and Gomorrah "and the Lord went his way as soon as he had left communing with him."‡ Few will be found who believe that this was effected by the agency of words or of material existence; if it was not, it follows that there is a revelation in which the will of the Father is perceived, and known in the soul, by its own immediate per-

\* Matt. xiii. 3.    † Gen. iv. 7.    ‡ Gen. xviii. 33.

ceptions ; uninfluenced and uncontrolled by any outward circumstances.

Following the train of scripture history, we find similar language. The word of the Lord came to the prophets, &c. And Elijah is represented as conversing with the Almighty, in the cave at Horeb. Numerous are the accounts that are given of directions received by man from his Maker, through the intervention of visions of various kinds, all referring to the same spiritual communion.

In the New Testament the same language is maintained—the agency of the Holy Ghost and of angels is recorded, and the figures of Heaven, and Hell, and Satan, are resorted to, to impress the most simple truths.

When the disciples of Christ queried of him, “why speakest thou unto them in parables?” he answered, “because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.” “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart.\*” Or in other language their perceptions were so outward and carnal, that

\* Matt. xiii.

the sweet influence of the spirit of God, was obscured in their souls.

Conviction of truth can only be upon the soul itself; and though we may see visions and dream dreams, yet true faith is not the result of seeing or of hearing, but of internal conviction. This we may be convinced of by considering the representations of various kinds, which are made for the express purpose of pleasing the sickly desires of men; which though the eye sees, and the ear hears, there is no conviction and consequently no belief. Now as outward representations cannot of themselves produce belief, it seems extraordinary, that their agency has ever been believed in, or considered by serious minds necessary, in the communion between God and man; it can only be accounted for, by that state of darkness, which, "seeing, perceives not, and hearing, does not understand."

However varied the language may be, in which the communication of God's will to man is described; whether under the figure of a vocal voice; of a ministering angel, or a Holy Ghost, I conclude the same spiritual influences are alluded to.

The New Testament, containing less metaphor than the Old, has many direct references to

this intuitive word of grace in the soul of man; so plain and simple, that it would be difficult to misconstrue them; and they are entitled to consideration as the experience of pious and holy men.

Do they any where direct man to his fellow-man to know his duty to God—to study books or chronicles, to be taught what ~~they~~ should do? nay truly: their admonitions are of a totally different character; they direct to the light, to the grace of God, as a teacher which every one shall know for himself.

Were I to quote the very numerous passages which relate to the subject, which I forbear from their general familiarity; it would not be from a belief that any one, either could, or ought to believe in them, merely upon the authority of scripture; such an idea would tend to idolatry, by putting them in the place of God himself. But as I may treat of the scriptures hereafter, I will leave the subject at this time, only observing, that whatever language is used, whether speaking of Christ, the power and the wisdom of God, of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, the Comforter, the Word, or the grace of God; it all has reference to that one universal principle, which shows man good and evil; which has been the same in every age of the world;

and which I have assumed to be, the only true and perfect guide of our lives, and rule of faith and practice.

I well know that there are many persons who draw distinctions between different eras of the world—the patriarchal—legal—and gospel dispensations. They have seen in the metaphorical language of scripture, the familiar intercourse which God held with the patriarchs, without any record of those forms and ordinances in religion, which have since been deemed so essential; that this state was succeeded by one of Law and Ordinances, which they believe were finally abrogated by the outward coming of Jesus Christ.

Let us now leave the carnal views which man has drawn from an abuse of the scriptures, and retire to the contemplation of the universality of the love of God; and see whether we can for one moment believe, that the Father of mercies has been partial to his creature man. Who is there that is bold enough to declare that he is the object of this partiality? I believe there is none: on the contrary if left to himself, each would feel, that he was one of the children of a common father, whose mercy and justice extends alike to all; and would probably believe that the same principle of eternal truth that

spoke to the patriarchs, to the prophets and apostles, speaks as intelligibly to him : " I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." Proverbs viii. 23, 24, 25, 35.

There are other persons, who, while they admit the truth of some of these remarks, yet say that revelation has ceased, or that man is the subject of but partial illuminations of the spirit. But if the end of its manifestation at all, is to save men from sin, " if it is not sufficient for the end, why then has it been manifested at all?" This is the language recorded of an Indian chief, said to have been delivered to a missionary, who was endeavouring to convert him to what he called christianity. " It is clear" he adds " that a revelation insufficient to save, cannot put us in a better condition than we should be in, without any revelation at all ! We cannot conceive, that God should point out to us the end we ought to arrive at, without opening to us the way to arrive at that

end." These are the natural sentiments of an unbiassed mind.

Most assuredly there never has been any other change in dispensations than what we witness in the present day. The effect of a departure from that primeval simplicity, which is wholly dependant upon God, in which he is immediately the judge and lawgiver; is the establishment of outward laws to restrain men and bind them together; and these are only certainly abrogated by the power of God in the soul, which blots out the hand writing of ordinances, and frees man from the law of sin and death.

The great object of life is salvation, and any view that is so contracted and partial, as to admit the idea that the situation of any one man or class of men, is more eligible for this end, than that of any other; is unworthy the consideration of a religious mind.

All mankind of every age, are alike the subjects of divine regard. In every nation, "he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."\*

The leading divisions of men are, into what are called Pagans or Infidels, Jews, Mahomedans or Musselmen and Christians; these again

\* Acts x. 25.

are divided into thousands of various sects, but a man is no more a Christian or an Infidel, for being called by these names, than the Jew was formerly for being one outwardly.

No man is saved in his sins, it would be a contradiction in itself.

Does any one suppose that each of these different sects are saved by a different salvation, merely because the forms of their religion are different? If they do not it will then follow, that there must be some universal principle of salvation that comes alike to all; without regard to the forms of their religion or the names by which they are called: or it is not true, that among every nation, those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted of Him.

Christians have generally agreed that there is but one means of salvation, and taking the literal meaning of scripture, they refer salvation to a happy existence beyond the grave; and say that the offering of Christ upon the cross, is the means appointed by the Almighty to accomplish this end; and they are puzzled exactly to know how all are saved by it, so few ever heard of it, in comparison to the great numbers born before and since him; some have gone one length and some another, one sect who have lately published their faith, affirm, that "as

true as there is a God in Heaven," Christ went into hell, after his crucifixion, and preached there during the three days before his resurrection, that so those who died before his birth, should hear his voice and have the means of redemption, some speak of a purgatory, some are equally certain of a visible world, and of churches and thrones; some of a state of fixedness, others of a progression of happiness and of misery beyond the grave; others again, attempt to prove, that souls of righteous men alone ever realize immortality. Such views, though seriously entertained by many grave men, appear to have no connexion with religion: why do we attempt to look beyond the grave? we know nothing of that state, a veil of deadly silence is drawn, which we cannot penetrate.

It is the remission of sin of which I speak, I might speculate about a future existence, and show scripture authority for or against any particular faith; but as I have no knowledge, nor anxiety, and do not realize that religious minds need have any concern about it, if they have any confidence in the justice of their heavenly Father; I shall not enter into the subject. But for their carnal views, I should most sincerely unite with them, that Christ was the means of salvation; but I should refer to that principle

alone which is spoken of, "as Christ within, the hope of glory," as "the wisdom and power of God," &c. &c. and herein there is no difficulty, in knowing how each individual is saved by Christ; because this Christ was in the beginning with God, this was the Rock which the Israelites drank of in the wilderness, this is the bread which came down from heaven, which men must eat of, to be saved; and which is no other than the spirit of God, operating upon the hearts of all men. For as the most exalted name or most beautiful forms of religion, never have, nor ever can bring a man any nearer to the kingdom of heaven; so on the other hand, no outward circumstances can of themselves separate him from it; but they have precluded a large proportion of the rational creation from a knowledge of the outward manifestation of Christ in the person of Jesus. Hence the dilemma to which people are put, to reconcile how men are saved by the sacrifice of a person they never heard of.

If I could for a moment conceive, that that small portion of mankind, who have heard of, and know of Jesus Christ: or any sect among them, have any peculiar privileges conferred upon them by the great Father of mercies,—that he has extended his power to give them any

means of salvation or of happiness, which he had not dispensed in a proportionate degree, to every other part of his intelligent family ; I should almost wish every feeling to leave me, that was founded upon so partial a religion ; and desire rather to be classed among the beasts of the field, than to receive the boon of happiness, while thousands of other men as worthy as myself, created by the same power, and equally dependant upon it, were placed without the reach of salvation.

My views of religion are not so contracted. The religion which Jesus, Christ spoke of had not its beginning with ~~his outward dispensation~~. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus distinctly speaks of that God "that is in thee to rule over thee," and the "unbiassed reason" to which Socrates yielded the government of his life, was no other than a degree of that spirit, which Jesus testifies of ; and which was manifested to each of their minds by the equal light of truth. Confucius makes use of a term nearly similar to express the same thing—names do not alter realities—I contend not about them ; if one man calls that reason or conscience, which I call the power of God, I am not at issue with him ; I have no preference in terms—"unbiassed reason," is no more the principle of deduction by which man weighs

and ballanees, and decides by consequences, which he can throw into one or the other scale, than it is fate or chance.

It was doubtless by the power of truth, that Socrates gained the entire dominion over his passions and appetites, and exhibited one of the most extraordinary instances of wisdom and virtue. And thus he triumphed over the fear of death. "It would be inexcusable in me," said he, "to despise death, if I were not persuaded that it would conduct me into the presence of the Gods, who are the most righteous governors, and into the society of just and good men;" and being queried of, respecting the disposition of his body after death, he said, "is it not strange after all I have said to convince you, that I am going to the society of the happy, that Crito still thinks, that this body which will soon be a lifeless corpse, is Socrates? Let him dispose of my body as he pleases, but let him not at its interment mourn over it as if it were Socrates."

In accordance with the life and death of Socrates, were the principles of many of those, who are distinguished as heathen philosophers. Though they did not all speak the same language, any more than men do in the present day; yet many of their doctrines will be found

to be of the most sublime and exalted character, and exactly to tally with those of modern time. Some made virtue to consist in benevolence, and promoting the happiness of their fellow creatures—others looked to some ultimate end—others again, declared virtue and happiness to be independent of all outward circumstances. The rule to regulate their conduct, being placed within their own breasts, was considered to have been given them by Jupiter, and that happiness consisted in the disinterested discharge of their duty, without any anxiety about the event. That this led to a state, in which, participating in the divine harmony, they rejoiced even at those events which are considered the most adverse to happiness, and received health or sickness, riches or poverty, with an equal mind: that by imitating the love and charity of God, the perfection of virtue would be attained, and the soul assimilating to the Divine nature, would participate in its attributes of benevolence and love, and ultimately attain to an immediate converse and communion with Deity.

These are the outlines of the different views of virtue, handed down to us from the ancient sects, in those nations which are considered to have been the most civilized; but the eternal

and immutable light of truth was confined to no set of men; writers of other nations which have been viewed as more barbarous have left the most ample records of their belief in the one universal standard of truth.

The Chinese who have taken the name of the celestial empire, seem entitled to it, from a system of government which, probably more than any other, acknowledges the light of truth in the soul of man, as that great principle which God has given to him to rule and govern his life.

From the empire of China strangers are almost totally excluded, so that there is little real knowledge to be obtained of a people, said to be more numerous than any other. We know they exist, but the principles which have preserved such a remarkable degree of peace in the empire, extended as it is, are but little adverted to. The French Jesuits, who were located many years in China, published some particulars respecting the Chinese, which are the more remarkable as being in opposition to the sentiments which have been received from travellers, who though they nominally have entered the empire, have been really excluded from it.

Le pere Noel, after studying the Chinese language for twenty years, translated several of their

classical works, by Confucius and his followers upon religion and morality, written originally some centuries before the Christian era; he refers to other works long antecedent to them, containing the same principles. Throughout several volumes a reference is made to that law which God has placed within the breast, "which is felt in the depth of the heart," the attendance to which, it is declared, will raise man to the most exalted perfection. It is impossible in a few extracts, which I shall translate from one of these works, to do justice to the sentiments; the following is from "The just Medium" by Tsée-sec, grand-son of Confucius; the object of this work is to prove, that man has a law which he ought invariably to follow, "(que l'homme a une loi, qu'il doit suivre inviolablement.)" "The science of the just medium which the wise man follows, immense by the extent of its object, is nevertheless very simple in its self: every one can make use of it; no one can sound its depth, because it encloses directly the most common rules of daily action, and the most hidden secrets of nature."

Though simple and ignorant men and women of the most limited capacities, may with this single intellectual faculty, which they receive from nature, know the doctrine of the just me-

dium in all that appertains to their ordinary actions and conduct every day of their lives, nevertheless the most penetrating and extended genius, cannot know all the detail nor embrace the whole."

"The doctrine of the just medium which the wise man follows, descends even to the details of the private life of individuals; and this principle so simple, which enlightens and directs the lowest condition, spreads itself on all the earth, elevates itself to heaven, enlightens with its rays, and fills the world with its splendour. The doctrine of the just medium, is the light and rule of all beings. This sublime knowledge is not far from man, it is the rule for the common actions of human life, so that all men can easily know and practise it. We pretend uselessly to follow the just medium, if neglecting the common duties, we only aim at the extraordinary opinions and manners, which are different from those of other men."

"Thus, though this rule presents itself, and is capable of being read by all the world, though there is not an instant of the day in which it ought not to be used, nevertheless we find few persons, who turn their attention towards it, who reflect upon it, and above all who follow it."

“In all conditions the wise man is tranquil and calm, because he sees himself always under the direction of Providence, and in the place which it has marked for him.”

I have met with no sentiments either of earlier or later time, more full recognising the principle of eternal truth than these books. Le pere Noel, translates the term which the Chinese gave it, (*droit raison*) or right reason, and he attributes to its precepts, the peace, the happiness, the concord which during a period of three thousand years, has mostly distinguished the Chinese empire; he adds, “the system of the Chinese legislators is one of the finest monuments of the efforts of the human mind, to make virtue, peace, and happiness reign upon earth:” a sentiment expressed in Peking, and lately published in our newspapers accords with these views, and which I repeat from recollection, “the eternal principle of truth in the soul of man, obedience to its dictates will make a heaven on earth.” \* \* \* \*

I shall close my observations on the Chinese with extracts from an English translation of some of the writings of Confucius. “A perfect man is always contented with his condition, he desires nothing beyond it, with submission and an even spirit, he expects whatever heaven

shall ordain concerning him. Thus he rejoiceth in a certain tranquillity, which is comparable to the top of those mountains, which are higher than the regions where the thunder and tempests are formed."

"If our love is blind, and mere passion, if it is flesh and blood, which makes us act, this affection is irregular, because it digresseth from the rule of right reason.

Reason and Innocence, have been equally given or communicated to the wise and to the saints, and likewise to all other men; but the Saint has never in the least declined from right reason, and has constantly preserved his integrity: whereas, the wise has not always preserved it, having not always followed the light of Reason; because of several obstacles he has met with in the practice of virtue, and especially by reason of his passions, whereunto he is a slave.

Those who have lost their first integrity and desire to regain it, are comparable, to withered and almost dead trees, that notwithstanding, have in the trunk and roots a certain juice, a certain principle of life, which makes them cast forth shoots—If we take care of these trees, if we cultivate them, water them and prune off the dead branches, it will happen that this tree will re-assume its former state—after the

same manner, although one has lost his first integrity and innocence, he need only excite the good that remains, use pains and industry and he will infallibly arrive at the highest virtue.

The state of the wise is called "the Reason of Heaven," or the first rule which heaven has equally distributed to all men, and which the saints have always observed, without turning either on the right hand, or on the left."

The wise man is always pleased, and he alone—Virtue renders his spirit quiet, nothing troubles him, nothing disquiets him, because he practises not virtue for a reward—the practice of virtue is the sole recompense he expects.

The natural light, is only a perpetual conformity of our soul with the laws of heaven—men never can lose this light. It is true, that the heart of man being inconstant and wavering, it is sometimes covered over with so many clouds, that it seems wholly extinguished. The wise man experiences it himself; for he may fall into small errors and commit light offences: yet the man cannot be virtuous, while he is in this state; it would be a contradiction to say it."

Menu, who lived near a thousand years before the Christian era, and who is looked upon in Indostan, as Confucius in China; left behind

him writings which form the basis of the Hindoo law; they were translated by William Jones, and the author of his life, speaking of them says, "that a spirit of sublime devotion, of benevolence to mankind, and of amiable tenderness to all creatures, pervades the whole work, and that the sentiments of independence upon all beings but God are truly noble. And the many panegyrics upon Gayatri, the mother as it is called of the Veda, prove the author to have adored, not the visible sun, but that divine and greater light, to use the words of the most venerable Indian scripture, "which illumines all, delights all, from which all proceed, to which all must return, and which can alone irradiate."

In what Christian country can we find a more pointed and explicit public recognition of the Divine law in man, than that contained in the following address, which the judges in the Hindoo courts, are directed to make to the witness? "The soul itself is its own witness: the soul itself is its own refuge: offend not thy conscious soul, the supreme internal witness of man! The sinful have said in their hearts, none see us; yes the gods distinctly see them, and so does the spirit within their breasts."\*

\* Graham's Letters.

As in Asia so in the western Hemisphere, the same eternal principle is every where spoken of and acknowledged.—The American Indians have had no writers among them, to leave behind them records of the feelings of other times ; they have been considered as more the children of nature, than almost any other people ; yet in our intercourse with them, they always refer to the agency of the “ Great Spirit ;” and it is doing them only common justice to say, that many of those virtues which are thought to adorn the Christian character, are more conspicuously displayed among them, than in most civilized nations. General Wilkinson, whose long official intercourse with the Indians, is well known, has stated, that he never knew them first to break a treaty ; the aggression always commenced with white men.

Heckewelder who resided forty years among the Indians, commends in high terms their probity and justice ; he states that they consider themselves to be a purer race of people than the whites ; that they say, “ they have no need of any book to teach them the will of their maker, they find it engraved on their own hearts, they have had sufficient discernment given them to distinguish good from evil, and that

by following that guide they are sure not to err."\*

But though I have stated the sentiments of a few men, and could produce many others, I am so far from appealing to them as any authority, that I believe, dwelling upon their testimony, for the knowledge of revelation, would tend to divert the mind from that evidence, which alone can bring conviction of it. I appeal not to books or men, but to the feelings within the breast. Where is the person that can say, that he has not been shown good from evil by intuitive feelings. To attempt to prove that the principle exists within us, would be, to unbiassed minds, as unnecessary as to prove that God exists without us—and because it is obscured by our selfish feelings, it is no more proof of its non-existence, than that the sun does not shine, because we do not always see it; yet such is the prevalence of priest-craft *that it is* and in this term I never mean to refer to the *-vice* contrivances of those called priests in particular, but to every scheme which does, in principle or fact, attempt to beguile men, by diverting them from the simplicity of that religion, which is pure and spiritual; to the Bible or any

\* Historical and Literary Transactions.

other thing, as the rule of their lives—it is not men that I am speaking of, but principles.

The Christians have their Bible, the Mahomedans their Koran, the Hindoo the writings of Menu and their own Scriptures, and the Chinese the precepts of Confucius: they all have their particular merits, and so far as each may have its basis in the unchangable and everlasting truth, they are entitled to the same consideration; and it is no ~~less~~ extraordinary that one people should pay divine honours to the Koran, than another to the Bible.

The Bible is one of the great Idols of Christians, no man that keeps a single eye unto God, can look upon it as a rule of life; in proportion as it is exalted in the minds of men, it holds the place of the principle of eternal truth; it usurps the place of God, it fills his throne, and takes his glory—The Bible is in no manner or way whatever, a ~~primary~~ rule for the life of man; it never was designed as such, and is perverted from its only proper use, when it is made so. I have no wish to derogate from its real merits; as the record of the sentiments of pious men, it is entitled to respectful attention; but the real and true use of the Bible, is to lead men to the light: when it ceases to do this, it is an Idol indeed, and from which the pious man would as certainly

turn away, as from an image of stone or wood. In itself it is imperfect—as a record incomplete—as an independent rule of faith of no authority.

It is not to disturb the feelings of any one, who has placed his faith in the Bible, nor is it to call in question either the truth or the excellency of many of the sentiments contained in it, that I thus write; but to declare the sincere convictions of my own heart, that it is not a certain immovable touchstone of Truth, but an “unsteadfast standard which men pluck to pieces as they please, and make meanings of, to suit their own purposes.” If we consider that the Bible has gone through thousands of different versions; that every nation have agreed in the necessity of making comments to illustrate its doctrines; that they were sometimes interlined, and sometimes mingled with the text; we can readily perceive, why fifty-four translators were deemed necessary, to produce our present version. The rules which king James gave them, “to be most carefully observed” in their work, carry the idea of imperfections with them; “that the Bishop’s Bible be followed and as little altered as the original will permit, the old ecclesiastical words to be kept, as the word church not to be trans-

lated congregation, &c. that in cases of doubt, the differences to be compounded."

Dr. Clarke, the most erudite commentator of the present day, after speaking of the general correctness of the translation, says, he had found it necessary to re-examine all the *Italics*, or words not in the original, but put in to accommodate the idioms of the Greek and Hebrew to the English; in these, he says, "I found gross corruptions, particularly where they have been changed for Roman characters, whereby words have been attributed to God which he never spoke."

It is incomplete as a record, not only because its chronology is confessedly defective, but that a number of books referred to in the text, are altogether wanting. But though ample materials are at hand, by which I could much more fully illustrate its many inaccuracies, yet I forbear. It would indeed be a far more pleasing task, to point to the excellency of the maxims which it contains, and leave its faults: but while there are so many disposed to treat it as a test of faith and practice; and others to call it the word of God, it has appeared right for me to say enough clearly to draw this conclusion, that a thing so imperfect cannot be a rule for the Faith of any man; and it will also follow,

that there must be some other standard of truth, by which the conduct of the lives of accountable creatures is to be regulated, or else there is no standard at all; an alternative which no feeling mind will be willing to adopt; and this standard can be no other than the Light of Truth shining in the soul of each individual, and to which alone each is accountable.

John Hunter who was domesticated among the Indians, and possessed an opportunity of knowing them fully; gives them a character for integrity and virtue, far better than that of the white man. We have never heard of their being divided in sects, or persecuting each other for the formula of religion—they have no outward test of faith, yet he says they daily pay their adorations to the Great Spirit. The case with Christians is totally different—they have an outward test of faith—are divided into innumerable sects and parties—and employ a considerable part of their lives in establishing their own forms, and finding fault with other men; and with many of them, worship is supposed to be located in houses made of wood and stone! and all this appears to have taken its origin from an abuse of that book which we call the Bible. From it, contentions have arisen, not only between different societies, but among

members of the same society; which have often ended in the most violent animosities and bloodshed—man has been arrayed against his fellow-man, and the loss of thousands of lives, ~~have~~ evidenced the falsity of a religion founded upon an outward test.

The most extravagant interpretations of scripture, are supported by plausible arguments; and each votary of the Bible, assuming the idea that each and every part of it is true, feels himself bound as far as he can do it, to reconcile the most contradictory passages, often by the violation of truth itself.

The Bible is the standard, and every thing is to be brought to its tribunal to be judged; nay even those passages on the meaning of which men cannot agree, are forced from their true, real and spiritual meaning, and made the basis of the creeds and ceremonies which are established among those called Christians; so that probably there is no one of all the various sects, but what has received as a certain and inviolable standard of doctrine some one, or more of them, to the interpretation of which no other sect will agree; and which are felt by every feeling, pious mind, to be at variance with the principle of vital religion. The case is the

same in other countries. The sacred books of the Hindoos, which lay claim to the greatest antiquity, have been the cause of great diversities of views; and the Hindoos, and the believers in the Koran, are each divided into numerous sects as well as Christians; and all show their authority for their respective practices.

The books of the Veda, "as expressly recognize but one supreme intelligence as our scriptures, to whom alone all are accountable." Yet from an abuse of their sentiments, as is stated in a work translated from the Bengalese,\* and lately printed in Calcutta, has been derived the practice of burning widows on the funeral pile of their deceased husbands; and Rammohun Roy† expressly says, that the worship of Idols in Hindostan, is derived from the allegorical passages in the Hindoo Scriptures.

The abuse of the scriptures in Christian countries, as they are called, is equally apparent; if it suits men to set up a visible head of the church—to ordain and pay men to preach and to pray for them—to establish inquisitions and religious synods, to exercise a power over the consciences of their fellow creatures;—to reconcile the most deadly forms, nay even to administer

\* See Conference on burning Widows.

† Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Hindoos.

oaths, to swear, or to fight; all these things, and many other inconsistencies, are supported for Christian practice, from particular parts of not only the Old, but the New Testament; so that whether for a rule of faith or practice, the Bible will be found to be "a mere nose of wax," "a Lesbian rule" which men may cut and carve, and mould as best pleases them."

These sentiments are not new, they were boldly advanced in the seventeenth century, by an enlightened and pious man; but such is the estimation in which most of the high professors in religion now hold the Bible, that no man, who was not raised entirely above the love of their affections, or the fear of their frowns, would venture to repeat them, or to speak the simple truth respecting it. Formerly the case was different. Great precaution was used in publishing the scriptures, it was made death in the reign of Henry 5th, for common people to read them, and copies of them were only allowed at a much later period in some of the churches, and were there affixed by a chain; and by royal authority it was decreed, that they should be read "moderately, and not for strife;" a law was afterwards made, to prohibit all but gentlemen and merchants from perusing them; in the preamble it is stated, "that many sedi-

tious and ignorant persons had abused the liberty granted them for reading the Bible, and that great diversity of opinion, animosities, tumults, and schisms had been occasioned by perverting the sense of the scriptures.”\*

In taking a more enlarged view of those nations which have had the Bible, and seem to consider themselves as the peculiar objects of Divine regard, if it were not for the assurance of the truth and immortality of the religion of Jesus Christ; I might blush that I was a white man, or a Christian. Oppression and bloodshed have marked their footsteps in every quarter of the world; and it would be difficult to say whether the poison of their deadly touch, had been most sensibly felt, by the simple inhabitants of Asia, Africa or America.—“Leave us to ourselves,” is the emphatic language of every people, where their feet have trod, “your friendship is deceitful, your smiles are artifices;” and yet missionaries go among them to labour to convert them to what they call Christianity!—A sword is held in one hand and the Bible in the other. Can there be a greater infatuation?

“White men would always be telling us,” says the Indian, as recorded by Heckewelder, “of the great Book which God has given to

\* Humes history of England.

them, they would persuade us that every man was good who believed in what the Book said, and every man was bad, who did not believe in it. They told us a great many things, which they said were written in the good Book, and wanted us to believe it all. We would probably have done so, if we had seen them practise what they pretended to believe, and act according to the *good words* which they told us. But no! while they held their big Book in one hand, in the other they had murderous weapons, guns and swords, wherewith to kill us poor Indians! Ah! and they did so too, they killed those who believed in their Book, as well as those who did not. 'They made no distinction.!'\*

It is not only the Bible, but other books are referred to, as standards of faith. They may be objects of curiosity, as showing the sentiments and feelings of men of other times; but all books are to be placed upon the same footing, and any confidence in them may shew us where our faith is; every hope in them proceeds from a want of confidence in the power of God; a religion that is founded upon books, is no religion at all.

Neither is example any thing—following the most holy men, cannot make us holy, nor do

\* Historical and Literary Transactions.

ought towards effecting our righteousness: for as sin is in the mind, so is salvation there. It is there the work must begin, and there it must be accomplished. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light," but the eye is not single that is looking upon books or men—even upon the outward conduct of so righteous a person as Jesus Christ as a pattern, and inasmuch as we do so, we form to ourselves an idol, which we worship instead of God.

So far from denying the divinity of Christ, I have the most assured belief of it; but he was made divine, as all men must be, by his obedience to the power of God which dwelt in him, he was made "perfect through suffering," and nothing suffered but those feelings, which he had in common with the whole human family—It would be presumptuous to attempt to follow his footsteps, or adopt his sentiments, excellent as they may be, but by and through the convictions of our own minds, which would make them also true to us.

No part of the ministry of Christ was more pure, than where he directed his followers from himself unto God; telling them that "he that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me," John xii. 44, and this ap-

pears to have been the whole drift of his ministry. There is no true belief in Christ, that is founded on his birth, miracles, death, or resurrection; it is only by a unity in the one spirit with him, in which we become his brethren, co-heirs with him, that we truly know, that he was indeed the son of God. Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister and mother." Mark iii. 35.

I well know how much mankind are looking to the outward and corporeal body of Christ; professing to have a dependance upon his intercession for them at the throne of the Father; and upon his blood, shed upon the cross; some as washing away their sins, and others, as the means the infinite and merciful Jehovah has made use of, to give salvation to man!! Such outward views, I may term ridiculous, without feeling disposed to ridicule any serious subject; but truly, I do not know any better word to make use of.—If they be true, it will follow that Judas who betrayed Jesus, and the Jews who nailed him to the cross, have all been instruments of our salvation! Pontius Pilate who delivered him up to be crucified, should be hailed as that man, who most of all contributed to effect the salvation of his fellow creatures! Surely the feelings of Pilate must have deceiv-

ed him, when he appeared ready to give Barabas to be crucified, and release Jesus; and of Judas, when, unable to bear the convictions of his own mind, he went away and hung himself!

There are those, who while they would speak of the errors of Pontius, and of Judas, yet hail the death of Jesus, as the most glorious and auspicious event;—as the means which God has appointed to give salvation to man! Let me ask them, what would have been the result, if there had been no wicked men to put him to death? If <sup>Pilate</sup> ~~Pilot~~ had really set him free? the answer would be like their belief, full of inconsistencies—that this could not have happened, because the means were appointed to the end—A faith that so far takes away the free agency of man, as to make him the actor in blood and murder, because this is the fate that is decreed to him; is unworthy the consideration of a rational and intelligent mind. The simple truth is, that the death of Jesus has no more connexion with our salvation, except as his example is followed from internal conviction, and obedience to the Divine Principle, than the death of any other righteous man, or even than that of an unintelligent creature.

It was not the flesh and blood of Jesus that was the Saviour, but the power of God which

dwelt in him, which dwells in us: the one universal spirit which is omnipresent and eternal; and which is the only proper rule for our lives; because it is the universal principle of salvation, the world over—this is truly our Saviour: because, it alone can save from sin, and is no more to be worshipped in Jesus Christ than in any other righteous and holy man.

Paul says, that “though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth, know we him no more.”\* And Jesus, “it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you,”† They both saw, that the eyes of men were directed outward; and whenever it is so, Christ becomes a stumbling block and a rock of offence. There can be no full belief in the Divinity of Christ, that is founded on any outward thing; and as the mind comes to be introduced into the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Heaven, it knows Christ no more after the flesh; but in the power of an endless life; being united unto him as brethren of one common family: having and believing in the Father, we have also the Son, and believe in him; or in other words, in the power of God which dwelt in him; this was that power that made the world; by it

\* 2 Corinth. v. 16.

† John xvi. 7.

Jesus did all the mighty works which are recorded of him; and in a perfect union with it, knew that all power was given to him in heaven and in earth. There is no truth which applies to Jesus, but what applies to every other man in the same state of holiness that he was in; a state which appears to be adapted and designed for every child of Adam.

Many Christians pretend to wonder that the Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ as they do; as his coming was in accordance with prophecy; but they in reply, say that those prophecies refer no more to one person than another, and defy their opponents to show that they do. Yet still they continue to apply every thing to one particular person, whom they call second in the trinity. And it is only those, from whose eyes the veil is rent, that without any critical knowledge of the Bible, believe that the prophecies which are thought to apply to Jesus, apply to the principle rather than to the man; and that all that is said of Jesus Christ must be true to every one that lives in the power of the principle. For although there may be passages as, "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. John x. 9. I am the vine and ye are the branches:" yet all these things are spoken of that principle

which is the word "which was in the beginning with God, and which was God." As Jesus said upon another occasion, "the words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life,"—"it is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." And again, "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the work." John xiv. 10. These passages must apply to the divine principle, for nothing else can save us from sin but the power of God, unless we become Polytheists and believe that there are more Gods than one.

Some contend that the Power and Form are not to be separated; if so, then has God been reviled, spit upon, buffeted, and finally crucified by sinful men; than which nothing can be more inconsistent with every rational feeling.

Many are the absurdities into which men are led, who look outward rather than inward, for the Divinity of Christ. None can ever fully know that Jesus was the son of God, but by knowing themselves to be such.

"All who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God." And it is alone in this power of sonship, that full perception of the Divinity of Christ can be had: this is no mystery, but consistent with the plainest doctrines of scrip-

ture : and the man who is as perfectly redeemed from the pollutions of humanity as Jesus Christ was, I believe to be as much and as truly, the son of God as ever he was.

It was the humanity of Christ that was tempted—it was that which suffered in the garden—it was that which prayed, “suffer this cup to pass from me,” we every where trace the feelings of a man ; and see throughout, a remarkable manifestation of that power which made him divine.

I meddle not with the account which we have of the birth and conception of Jesus. Whether it is true or not has no relation to us; and inasmuch as we rely upon it to prove his Divinity, we never can truly and effectually believe in it. The operations of nature in the production of animal life, are altogether incomprehensible ; and if men were usually born as it is said Jesus was ; every other way would be considered equally extraordinary as that which is given of him. “With God all things are possible !”

There are different geneologies recorded of Jesus : he is spoken of in more than one place in scripture, as the son of Joseph ; and it is well known that many pious men believe that he was so. Suppose it could be proved that he really was ; it would not in the smallest de-

gree, change any true faith in his Divinity : because it is founded on a different basis : while indeed a belief that has its origin in outward circumstances, must change or come to an end with them.

Miserable indeed must be our conceptions of the Divinity of Christ, when we are leaving the only certain evidence that we can have of it, to dispute about the manner of his birth, his death, or resurrection.

A dependance upon outward sacrifices originated in the darkest ages of superstition : though different animals were sacrificed in different countries ; yet one general ceremony was every where observed ; of praying the Gods to divert every calamity upon the head of the victim ; and hence the death of Christ is called the great atonement. It is believed in, by those who hold fast to the traditions of the fathers, which have been handed down from one generation to another ; but where is the unbiassed mind that can suppose that we are to look to an outward Christ, or to any act done without us, as an atonement for our sins ? where is the individual who has found one solitary sin removed by the atoning blood of Christ shed upon the cross ? Such ideas can hardly be seriously entertained, and yet it is the professed belief of many men.

The time will probably come, when the knowledge that such views ever did exist, will be confined to the pages of history.

The sentiments that I have given upon the subject, will be viewed very differently by different men; we cannot see alike, but through the same medium of vision; some may call them Deistical, Unitarian, and others perhaps blasphemous. None can believe them, but those who have had every outward support taken from them, and come to feel that reliance is not to be placed therein.

Just in proportion as the views of men are outward, will they be ready to judge those which are of a contrary nature, nothing else can be expected; they have not seen or understood, therefore they cannot believe even though they should wish to do so. And though there may be but few that can go the full length that I have done; yet there are many who partly believe these views to be true: the same power that has partially opened their eyes can alone effectually do it, and they will then see that not only partly, but wholly and altogether, the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom; and that no outward hope or dependance can introduce them into it.

Seeing then, that an outward belief in the

scriptures—or the precepts or example of Christ, neither is, nor can be a perfect rule to walk by; we must look for it elsewhere; and and we shall look in vain, but in our own souls.

I wish not to speak of individual men or societies; but it is not too much to say, that there is no sect of professing Christians, that believe that in the heart alone, is the test and touchstone of faith; examine the gravest authors in each society, such as are approved and recommended, and we every where see, that their faith is to be brought to the tribunal of the scriptures to be judged: though some of them say in words, that they are not the word of God; yet in reality they make them so; they bring that which they say is the word of God, to be judged by that which they declare not to be the word of God! Singular as this contradiction may appear, yet it is literally and exactly true! Do such not make the scriptures, the infallible word of God? I believe they do, as effectually as if they confessed it in words: they call them the scriptures of truth, every thing is referred to them: but like the Delphic Oracle, many of the questions they answer are still left uncertain;—men may understand their language as they please; hence the origin of most of the

controversies on religious subjects amongst Bible Christians.

If their language was less ambiguous, there would be less controversy—but it serves to amuse men: Those that come to the principle of truth within themselves, know, that in that alone is the fulness of joy and peace.

There is less essential difference, either between the different sects of Christians, or those in the heathen world, as to the real spirituality of the sentiments approved by them as bodies of men, than there appears to be; their modes of expression are different; but analyze them—strip them of their exterior appearance,—and they are much the same—they worship different idols, have different forms and ceremonies; can see plainly the errors of each other, while their eyes are closed to their own. But in making this assertion I may repeat what I have before said, that it is not words that makes a true Christian. No doubt there are many individuals in every sect, who while they subscribe to the formula that is ordained, bow to the idols that are worshipped, confess, in words, to the atoning blood of a visible Christ; have yet no real faith in them, it was the same in ancient times. Plutarch, as quoted by Rollin, speaks thus of the image worship of former ages.

“ Philosophers honour the image of God wherever they find it, even in inanimate beings, and consequently more in those which have life. We are therefore to approve, not the worshippers of these animals, but those who, by their means, ascend to the Deity ; they are to be considered as so many mirrors which nature holds forth, and in which the Supreme Being displays himself in a wonderful manner ; or, as so many instruments, which he makes use of, to manifest outwardly, his incomprehensible wisdom. Should men therefore, for the embellishing of statues, amass together all the gold and precious stones in the world, the worship must not be referred to the statues, for the Deity does not exist in colours, artfully disposed, nor in frail matter destitute of sense and motion.”

A late writer on Hindoo mythology, says, “ that though the numerous titles of the Deity are all referable to the sun, yet it is only considered as a type of that divine intellect, which pervades all things.” The same writer quotes the following among other texts from the Veda. “ That being from which these created beings proceed ; through which having proceeded from, they live : toward which they tend ; and in which they are ultimately absorb-

ed ; that spirit study to know ; that spirit is the great one.”\*

Is there any thing in all this very different from what we witness in the Christian world ? The idolatry of one people is more open, in another more disguised ; but the same thing intrinsically prevails—the same principles are apparent throughout the human family. Just so far as men come to know God manifested in their own flesh, they cease to make idols. The flesh and blood of Jesus is an idol ; some sects make a visible image of it ; others, one in the mind, and call it their Saviour, when it is no more so, than the crocodiles of Egypt, or the sun that is worshipped in Hindostan.

The propriety of image worship was long a matter of dispute in the early ages of Christendom—the overthrow of images was attempted in vain. Among the first that was attacked, was a brazen statue of Jesus—the ladders that were raised against it, were thrown down ; and it was declared that minor sins could be more easily pardoned, than failing of prostration at the shrine of the saints.

We witness the same feelings at the present day, in all the sects of Christians ; an outcry of

\* See Letters on India, by Maria Graham.

Deism, is raised against any one who refuses to bow to a visible Christ; and the language of conduct every where speaks to us—"we will overlook your minor sins, but you must subscribe to our forms and bow down to our images." And yet these sects are composed of men, who, blinded to their own idolatry, undertake the overthrow of that of other nations!

There must be idolatry where the true God is unknown; from the same cause the same effect proceeds; and all the profession in the world cannot change it: men may acknowledge the spirituality of the Christian religion, but this can no more turn them from idolatry, than it can dry up the waters of the ocean: as the tree so will be the fruit; the aspect may be different, but the reality is the same; and whether it manifests itself in worshipping the sun, moon, or stars, the beasts of the field or the fowls of the air, in depending upon a body of flesh and blood, upon the Bible, or any other thing; it is alike idolatry. Nay every hope that is placed upon them is a robbery of God. The conclusion will naturally be, by those who believe these sentiments, that idolatry is deeply rooted among men, and such is surely the fact: but I only write truths, which have been made manifest in my own mind, without judging or condemning

any man or set of men. With their sins I have nothing to do.

There is a state of existence, in which there is no looking to the creature, to find the Creator.

“ From Nature up to Nature’s God.”

But the power of God is first, then the creatures, and this is not idolatry.

But to return to my subject, with all the superiority that Christians assume, we meet with no one sect of them, whose principles come up to the high standard recorded of Plato, the heathen philosopher, and his followers, of “ loving God for his own sake.” Go into those houses called places of worship, and listen to the discourses which are delivered ; almost every sermon begins and ends in selfishness ; if happiness can be attained all is well ; so that I am sometimes ready to believe, that the mouth which now blesses would curse if Heaven was to be reached thereby ; they attempt to make conditions with their Maker ; and quote as true religion the sentiment which is recorded of Jacob. “ If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God.” Gen. xviii. 20, 21.

**Men may use language different from what they exactly mean, but if we credit what our preachers say, we cannot believe that they realize a pure disinterested love of God, but that in their view the prize of eternal life is to sway the virtue of men.**

Let us query whether real virtue can spring from self love? whether any thing can deserve the name which is founded either on the hopes of reward or the fear of punishment? It is well known that in weighing actions between men, nothing is considered pure but what springs from a disinterested motive.

I have already alluded to the Hindoo scriptures, and though their pages contain things which cannot be identified with pure religion, and which taken literally, have, like our own Bible, given rise to the most absurd practices; yet many passages which I have seen quoted from them, upon the subject under consideration, show great purity of doctrine respecting it. I select the following.

**“ Works performed, except for the sake of God, only entangle the soul. Therefore, O Urjoon, forsaking desire, perform works with a view to please God.”**

**“ The person who performs works without desire of fruition, directing his mind to God,**

obtains eternal rest, and the person who is devoted to fruition, and performs works with desire, he is indeed inextricably involved."

"Oh Urjoon, rites performed for the sake of fruition, are degraded far below works done without desire, which lead to the acquisition of the knowledge of God. Therefore, perform thou works without desire of fruition, with a view of acquiring divine knowledge. Those who perform works for the sake of fruition, are most debased."

"It is my firm opinion, that works are to be performed, forsaking their consequences, and the prospect of their fruits."\*

It is stated, that one of the most virtuous women of latter times, declared, that she was as ready to go to Hell as to Heaven, if that was consistent with the Divine will! in her the recompense of reward, was absorbed in her perfect love of her heavenly Father, and confidence that whatever was dispensed to her would be right; and this is the state of every truly redeemed mind. It is not a state of simple resignation, but a state of confidence, in which resignation is at an end, because there is nothing to resign. Other ancient philosophers besides Plato, taught this pure doctrine of perfect confi-

\* Second Conference, p. 6 and 7.

dence ; that men should not only be resigned to the will of the Gods, but should rejoice therein, whether in pleasure or in pain ; the death of children, or of the nearest and dearest friends, was to be viewed as the manifestation of that superior wisdom, which was alike perfect in all its operations. One of them makes this appeal—" O world, all things are suitable to me, which are suitable to thee. Nothing is too early or too late to me, which is reasonable for thee. All is fruit to me which thy seasons bring forth. From thee are all things ; in thee are all things ; for thee are all things. One man says, O beloved city of Cecrops. Wilt thou not say, O beloved city of God ?"

The eternal evidence of truth has operated alike, in every age of the world, pointing men to perfection ; and every where the natural appetites are leading to their own gratification. It is not assumed that the ancients were better either in their principles or practice, than those of succeeding generations ; but it is sufficient to show, that the increase of virtue, has never been dependant upon outward circumstances ; that though some men may call themselves Christians, and others Infidels ; they are neither better nor worse for bearing those titles.

The parallel could be made very perfect be-

tween men of every age and nation, by whatever name they may be called, or however high their profession. There is but little difference between the different sects of Christians; they are all subject to ordinances which perish with the using; some of one form, and some of another. Some baptise; some sprinkle with water; some partake of the typical body of Christ; some put on what they term a plain dress; some wash each others feet: they all plead scripture authority; but what is most inconsistent, each sect finds fault with those which it does not itself adopt.

All men are subject to ordinances, who take the Bible for the rule of their conduct; for what are ordinances but those things which are ordained; and whether they have been written since the promulgation of the scriptures; contained in books or creeds, they are precisely of the same nature, though one may specify one thing and another another; they all tend to idolatry, by putting written rules in the place of that power, which ought alone to rule and to reign in the hearts of the children of men—they sap the foundation of liberty of conscience, by prescribing what men shall do: and as these rules and ordinances do exist in every sect, so we find that there is not, perhaps, one indivi-

dual of them, which either in practice or principle, allow that the most honest and virtuous, should be governed by the sincere convictions of their own minds, even in those things which injure in no way, either the peace of society in general, or of their fellow members in particular.

Liberty of conscience is but a name, where there are written rules of conduct: and those who undertake to defend both, are led into extraordinary contradictions and inconsistencies. Thus we find those champions who most zealously defended liberty of conscience, when the tide turned, and they undertook to make rules for the religious conduct of other men, were led into the dilemma of pulling down what they had been building up: but in order to save appearances, or perhaps from not seeing their real condition, they called themselves the true church, assumed the power of vicegerents of Heaven, and usurped the authority of interfering between God and man.

Written rules for the conduct of men in their religious duties, proceed from the weakness of human nature, which confides rather in them, than in the power of divine love—a scar exists for some darling idol, and they are the consequences of it; as confidence increases in them,

societies naturally sink lower and lower, till they cease to be religious societies altogether. For what is religion but a dependance upon God? and when men depend upon lower objects, in the same degree religion ceases, and a formal profession takes the place of it, which has them for its basis—to them every thing is referred, and by them every thing is judged—if things go on in correspondence with them, all is well, and whoever transgresses them, is visited with the anathemas of the sect, without regard to the real good or evil of their actions; because being limited by them, which is the only object of rules at all, they can be no longer subject to God—thus written ordinances, hold the supreme place, their pale encloses all order, and limitations for the conduct of men, in reference to the Divine Being. They become idols that are fondly cherished, and those feelings, which Divine goodness has placed in our hearts are sacrificed to their preservation.

This is no picture, but unvarnished truth, and the enlightened mind must be convinced of it. Observe the conduct of Protestant societies, do we not see in them the operations of the same feelings, that appear to exist in what is termed “the mother church?” though no formal inquisition is tolerated, yet the loss of

personal liberty, fines and imprisonment have been the consequences of a deviation from written rules; even among those who most of all profess to be clear of ordinances, and to be led and guided by the unerring spirit of truth !

The mind that has been enlightened to see its own natural state, may view there, the seed of every species of vice that exists in the world ; as it is nourished it becomes a plant : so in each society as it is separated from the one standard of all truth ; it nourishes the evils which are incident to every other. And the fact is not so extraordinary, as that each should profess to be the true church, and assume privileges which belong thereto—however disguised the same features are recognised in all. It is not alone in their common idolatry, in their being subject to ordinances, and denying liberty of conscience, that we detect them ; they all pay priests wages ; all recur to the law as an ulterior resort, to support what they call their religious rights ; all concur in attempting to give men religious education ; all depart so far from the spirituality of the Christian religion, as to appoint set times and places for the performance of divine worship.

I feel myself at liberty to attempt no more than a general view of the truth of my asser-

tions, without descending into particulars ; for as I have already said, the knowledge of their reality must come from internal conviction ; without this, any effort to believe, would be useless.

It can hardly be supposed, that the stipend of a little money, is the only, or even the principal object of those who receive it, for preaching and praying for their fellow-men. The applause and approbation that is incident to their situation as public teachers—the superior respect that is shewn them, and the estimation in which they are held, is often a recompense dearer than this ; for although it may be certain, that very little applause or respect may follow many of them, yet the general observation is true, that more is bestowed on them, than they would be considered entitled to, as laymen, in private life. If I could see any society that placed their public preachers on the footing they ought to stand—as members of the common family—I would pass over the conduct of individuals, and confess, that that one paid no priests wages ; but on the contrary they are privileged men ; they are excused from services which others of perhaps greater godliness are subjected, and by a sort of common consent, a respect is shown them, somewhat corresponding to

their eloquence and power of utterance ; thus we behold the efforts which are made to give to each of them a seat, equal to the distinction which it is supposed he has a right to hold, and the pulpits or forms, which are appointed for them, are considered so much better than common seats, that others have been subjected to imprisonment for occupying them ; and we see ministers themselves so far acquiescing in it, as to suppose they are not at liberty to do certain things which other men may do, merely because they are such ; thus they pay homage to their own profession—These things have but one root—an idolatry that worships strange Gods.

Let me observe, that the mere receiving money for preaching, if it has no place in the mind, is not in any degree subversive to the end ; cannot be considered as the price of unrighteousness ; and is of a less subtle nature, than that other species of priest wages, of which I have spoken.

Men feeling their individual weakness, place their confidence either in that which is human or Divine ; and it flows into the channel correspondent to the state they are in ; when they are outward in their views, the law of force is resorted to ; not being gathered into that rest

which knows no harm and feels no offence; the contradiction is exhibited of a recurrence to human power, to preserve religious rights! from this cause has sprung every species of persecution, from the fire and faggots, and gibbets of other countries, to the more mild exercise of the law in our own.

We have no account of any intolerance so great, as that which Christendom has exhibited; it will continue to be seen, while men depart from the only sure rule of life; to be governed by written laws, and will increase or decrease as they are more or less adhered to.

Great efforts are making to spread the scriptures. If the reading of them has any other effect than to lead people to the Divine Light within themselves, of which they abundantly speak, it will increase the intolerance by setting up idols, which can alone be preserved by the edge of the sword.

In the different sects the effect is the same, they all have their particular order, their forms and their ceremonies to preserve; they can see the origin of persecution in others, because they condemn their forms; but cherishing their own, they see it not in themselves. They are all much alike, and they speak the same language relative to teaching men religion.

Though some sects establish theological schools, which others condemn, yet the moment that people acknowledge the possibility of religious education, they acknowledge the principle, that men may be taught of men. If this is true, they may make ladders and climb up to heaven. The Light of the power of God in the soul, is the only teacher—people may speak their views of virtue and vice, but it is *that* alone, which convinces of good and evil. I should be a bigot indeed to believe this power did not extend to all; that children coming into the world, without their own consent, unable to make choice of their situations; were not equally the subjects of Divine care; or that the condition of such as are born, in what are called the sinks of pollution and wickedness, were not on a footing with those nurtured in schools of morality and decorum.

Men who have established standards of virtue and rules for godliness, are led to judge and condemn conduct, which does not correspond therewith—but they cannot read the heart, they know nothing of its feelings and peculiar temptations. Different men from the same motives pursue paths widely different. If one consults his selfishness in getting drunk, and another in preaching and praying, and a third in encou-

raging gluttony; are they not actuated by the same motive? but bring them to the outward standards of virtue which are established; and one appears a sinner, another a saint, a third a man of liberality, whose fine entertainments tempt people to eat. As we judge of men, so of children, by some standard which we have set up for ourselves, not only of their moral conduct, which we can see and estimate; but of their virtue or vice in the sight of that holy and Divine Being, who alone can judge the heart.

It argues a want of confidence in the justice of God, to suppose that children alike innocent, have a better promise of salvation in one situation than another; or that they are in any degree dependant for their religion, upon the uncertain education they may receive, from those who surround them; and yet I have no disposition to break down the barriers which men have thought proper to establish, for the prevention of moral evils, or to discourage the education of children; but let us not undertake too much; we may perhaps mould their moral conduct, and this may be proper, but we cannot change their hearts; for outward laws in religion are non-entities.

Upon one subject the different sects of Chris-

tians profess to agree—that of building houses to worship in. If public preaching and praying is necessary, it may be reasonable that people should have an opportunity of doing so; but that they should appoint times to worship, and call their houses, “places of worship,” and “the houses of God,” would be truly astonishing, if men were not unacquainted with that fountain of love in themselves, which shows them that the heart of man is the temple of the Most High.

When we call a house, a place of worship, do we not as effectually make it the house of God, as if we called it so in as many words? Different sects have different forms, and those who most zealously deny having stated times to preach and pray, appoint hours and places for worship.

Why is it not altogether as consistent to preach and pray by appointment, as to worship by appointment? I believe there will be found to be no real difference between them! and yet some men are so attached to their own peculiar forms, that while they would censure their fellow members for assenting to the one, would equally blame them for denying the other. It would be well perhaps to consider what worship is. Is it simply attending, at what is call-

ed a place of worship? If this is worship, then indeed there may be some show of propriety in censuring those who do not attend there. If it consists in those heavenly feelings, which seem to make an approach to the Divine nature, these are I believe no more peculiar in meeting houses than in any other place: but if it consists, as every duty does, in simple obedience to God; then it may happen, that in censuring men, and visiting upon them the anathemas of the sect, they may be condemned for performing the most acceptable worship, which they can offer: for it hardly will be denied, but some may have had their eyes so far opened, as to realize that spiritual worship which Jesus directed the woman of Samaria to; which was not to be performed at places appointed for it, but in spirit and in truth.

Such are the inconsistencies to which societies are led, that are governed by written rules. For their preservation they sacrifice the very power of godliness, and though they call themselves religious societies, they deny fellowship with those whom they acknowledge to be innocent and virtuous, and who are most sincerely promoting religion, the only way that any man can do it, by performing their proper duty.

I have before spoken of the nature of much of the preaching which we hear, in what are called places of public worship; but in this there is less inconsistency—less to give offence to those who can be offended, than in the public prayers. Thousands of pages have been devoted to the composition of prayers; we have recorded, prayers for rain, and for fair weather; for times of peace, and for times of war; for deliverance from enemies, from sickness, and from every other thing which is called evil.

In proportion as men's minds are staid in a confidence in Divine goodness, a state of dependance and of praise is felt, rather than a state of prayer. Prayer is founded in selfishness; so that professing Christians most pray for what their selfish feelings most desire; and thus many of the public prayers, of men who profess to be spiritually minded, are of a nature which no truly pious man can adopt.

We hear public petitions, that “the Almighty will have mercy upon his humbly dependant creatures,” “that he will have his eye over us for good,” “that he will be near us,” and a variety of others, which no man can take into his mouth, whose soul is so far alive unto God, as to feel full confidence in his justice and mercy, that all his dispensations are in unerring

wisdom, that He is always near us to do us good, and that all error and imperfection is on our part. If we could listen to those prayers, and quietly leave them to these who prefer them; simply feeling as many must do, that they are not *their* prayers; there would be no abridgement of liberty of conscience; but more is expected and enforced, that every one should give some demonstration of joining in them, by kneeling, or standing, or pulling off their hats; thus they are called upon to do that from which their purest religious feelings revolt, publicly to assent to what they secretly dissent from; and I am ready to believe that scarcely one solitary individual is to be found, having any pretensions to religion, who has not more than once found himself in this dilemma; but the idols are to be preserved, come what may of true religion, they love their order and forms, and to these those feelings must yield, which they themselves profess to believe, are only worthy of having place in religious minds. These inconsistencies are every day developed, but none can see them whose eyes are blinded by prejudice, to a traditional and formal religion governed by written rules.

I could pursue this subject much further, and show the formality which exists among dif-

ferent sects of Christians in a more particular and palpable point of view, but I have no wish to bring them into notice : yet whilst there is so much hope and confidence placed in sects, it may do no harm to express those sentiments regarding them, which have been clearly opened on my own understanding; I do so, without condemning, or judging how much they may be adapted to the state men are in: but this I can say, that there are those living who have seen far beyond outward religious societies of any kind; their forms and their rituals.

There are, no doubt, very sincere and pious minds who place great hopes in the advantages to be derived from societies, but they seem to be like the people of Egypt already spoken of, who though they bowed down to images, really thought that they saw God in them. They can direct people from Paul, from Apollos, from Cephas, without appearing to be aware, that adhering to an individual society, is the same as to an individual man.

Paul and Apollos, were followed, we presume, for some excellence in their characters, and this is probably the reason that would be given by most men, for preferring one society before another. It is the principle of Divine love in the hearts of men, which alone can unite

them, and bring them into fellowship one with another, and this is altogether distinct from sectarian feelings, or written laws. Is this principle most felt, or most attended to, in any one society, that we are to love that one more than all the rest? Few will be willing openly to say that this is the case with their own sect, and if it really was so, is it any reason that they should call themselves by its name, more than men formerly, by that of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. Is the hedge of societies necessary to the maintenance of Divine harmony among men? so far from it, the moment written laws begin to act, in the same degree it ceases to exist. "We cannot serve God and Mammon," cannot be subject to them, and the Divine law; it is utterly impossible. This has been previously said, and it admits not only of the most perfect demonstration, but is consistent with every serious reflection: for if religion is spiritual, then must its laws be spiritual also.

Religious society is founded upon the idea of promoting religion; but suppose individuals were to take for the rule of their conduct, the laws which their respective sects have made; would they be any better for it? there must be at bottom, some real piety and virtue, or they would become mere formal bigots; so that se

far from the adherence to them, doing good, it would tend to build up a pharasaical righteousness, which like false coin, would be more scrupulously to be avoided, because it outwardly resembled that which was genuine.

This is the effect that follows from an adherence to outward laws; men are made righteous by them, but it is a righteousness wholly different from real purity of life : their hearts may be corrupt before their Maker, and yet "touching the law, blameless," that the most rigorous fulfilment of every iota which they exact, is not to be considered as the smallest proof of real godliness, or as the ascent of one step on the road to heaven.

If these positions cannot be controverted, the fulfilment of the laws which bind societies together, are wholly inefficacious, as a rule of life in religion ; and I may add, the more formal they become, the more they tend to the total extinction of it.

Seeing then, that without real piety, laws in religious sects, increase bigotry and self-righteousness, it can hardly be supposed, that when that exists, they can be of any real use—but the most plausible arguments in their favour, are drawn from an idea, that they are made for the disobedient, to restrain them by the influence

of certain penalties; the most common of which at this day is, dismembersh<sup>ip</sup>, or disuniting them from the society.

Jesus told his disciples—"If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established, and if he shall neglect to hear them, then tell it unto the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican." Matthew xviii. 15, 17. Upon this doctrine has been built, the superstructure of all church governments, from that of the Vatican at Rome, to every petty congregation, which taking to itself the power of the Almighty, assumes the privilege of interposing between man and his Maker—by judging and condemning sin—in denying communion with its members, or bringing them to confession, and passing by their offences.

It is not moral offences that are principally aimed at, for these the laws of the land take cognizance of; but religious offences, of which none can judge but that Being who sees the heart of every man. The power which dif-

ferent sects assume, under the idea that they are the church of Christ, is almost unlimited; and this is founded upon directions given by Jesus Christ to his immediate followers, which have no necessary relation to us, and which it is not too much to say, are neither the perfection of Christian experience, nor in accordance with those more sublime and exalted doctrines, which he at other times spoke of, and upon which he acted; not of telling of offences; not of letting men be as heathens to each other, but of loving our enemies, giving to those who would take from us; and of that humble dependance upon God, in which the excellence of his character and mission, are so beautifully displayed.

If the power of knowing the hearts of its members, was really delegated to societies; then indeed their might be reason, why they should undertake to judge them; but as they do not know the feelings and motives which actuate their conduct, they cannot know their sins, nor can they correct them; that it is an illusion to pretend to reform them, by the application of written laws: this is constantly exemplified in every country: men are most severely punished, but it seldom happens that they are reformed thereby: we so constantly witness the re-

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newed exercise of the civil law on the same individuals for similar offences; that there is great reason to doubt whether it is any means of reformation. It may by force restrain them from injuring their fellow-men; but every true amendment must begin in the heart, by obedience to that principle which God has placed there.

As we do not observe reformation and amendment to follow, from the punishments which the civil law inflicts, neither do we, from those of ecclesiastical tribunals. Where is the man that has really and truly been made better, by being dismissed from a religious society? if indeed it has made one better, it has made ten worse, by holding them as heathens; and even when this is not the issue, it is altogether to be doubted, whether the exertions of individuals, acting as such, would not always be more efficacious than those which are the effect of society contrivances, and which as they are official, so they are often formal and ungodly; for as a regular ordained ministry made by the appointment of men, does prevent the effusions of pure minds; so do official reformers, tend to discourage the honest efforts of other men, perhaps more pious than themselves. How far every act which is merely official in religion, is

to be placed upon a footing, it would not perhaps be very difficult to decide. If the effect that it has upon individuals is equivocal, that which is produced upon the sect is not so; confession of error is generally extorted, and societies are often built up in their own righteousness.

As people are introduced into the peaceable kingdom of Heaven, they of the spirit feel no offence, either individually or collectively; and then alone they constitute the church of the "first-born, whose names are written in Heaven:" this is believed in by many, who still taking authority from scripture, act therefrom, in opposition to those feelings which are before scripture or any other law. If in our walks among men, we were to separate ourselves from those who had offended us, or acted upon principles different from what we deemed right, letting them be heathens to us, practically adopting the language, "stand by thyself, I am holier than thou." Should we feel most peaceful in such conduct, or in returning good for evil? The answer is very plain, and yet men, professing godliness, act in society capacity, as they would be unwilling to do individually.

What do societies mean, when they speak of the true church, composed of all nations and

kindreds? and yet merely for the preservation of written rules, hold as aliens those who individually they believe to be honest and virtuous! Do they not deny in conduct what they profess in words, by letting the formula of religion draw lines of distinction between themselves and their fellow members? can such things be true? is there no reason to doubt the basis on which such religion stands? are there no sincere minds, actors in these things, who are convicted of their inconsistencies? none whose eyes are opened to see, that they originate in principles wholly adverse to true religion?

But even admitting, that offence is felt, and that the object of religious society is to increase virtue among mankind; is religion really increased by excommunicating men from their sects? the offender if he is such, who is cast off unconverted upon the world at large, remains as much one as he did before; and virtue is not increased thereby; nay further, if they believe, as they profess to do, that there is great good in being members of society; it is contrary to every pure principle of benevolence, to excommunicate those who most require their fostering care.

We may pursue all the bearings, which the written laws of the various sects have upon in-

dividuals, and we shall not find cause for their existence in any other, than selfish sectarian principles; which are looking to their own individual good, and which are distinct from those enlarged and heavenly views, which encompass all mankind the world over; which knows no sect or party, and which flowing from a pure dependance upon their heavenly Father, are as unlimited as his love.

I have before stated cases, in which societies may judge and condemn, for acts of real righteousness in individuals, and this proceeds from those principles, which look not so much to the promotion of true religion, as to the maintenance of their own particular order and ceremonies:—they undertake to limit the operations of the Holy Spirit, by circumscribing it within those bounds which they call order and godliness—they limit its operations, by condemning the most virtuous of their members, if it has pleased Divine Providence, to open their minds to more exalted views of virtue, than they themselves have,—they limit it, by supposing that men are better for being members of their societies, than of no society at all,—they limit it, by forming creeds as it were to assist God in regulating faith towards him; and they seem to doubt the sufficiency of his power,

when they direct men not to his light in their own minds, as a rule for the conduct of their lives, but to some uncertain and variable standard without them.

Such is the state of the various sects of Christians, and shall I yet believe, that membership with any one of them, is of any value? I can realize that a pious man might feel disposed to withdraw from all of them; but I can hardly imagine how any one could feel bound to assist in the support of those laws and creeds, which are so much in opposition to true religion,—to attempt to uphold, under the name of truth, that reputation which is so much an idol with each. Mistaken men! Truth needs not your support, you can neither build it up nor pull it down.

Such indeed, is the state of each society; such their outward views; that with much profession of a belief in Christ, I feel almost the assurance, that if he was to appear again as he did to the Jews; they would say in substance as *they* did; “we have a law and by our law he ought to die.” True it is, that the laws of the land, and the genius of the times, would forbid taking his life; but what if they were to see him, with a seamless garment, enter one of their houses called places of worship,

and say, with perhaps as much truth as he did to the Jews; that they were Pharisees, "tythed mint, anise and cummin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law;" what would they say, but that he should keep silence and not disturb their worship; if he continued to speak would they not thrust him out of their synagogue, apply to the civil law, put him in prison, and cry "crucify him, crucify him?" And this effect would probably be increased, if they knew, as the Jews did; that he came from among a people who were deemed heretic, for holding in utter contempt the righteousness of the Pharisees. The query would arise, "can any good come out of Nazareth?" "have the rulers believed on him?" If indeed he was regularly ordained, and had credentials of approbation to present to them, they would tolerate him in any kind of doctrine, but touching their idols.

This is no picture, but the words of truth and soberness. If what I have said, does not apply to every sect, the exception is to such as are not limited by creeds and written laws; and every sect has its creed, which has any other touchstone to judge of men by, than that of truth and righteousness. It is vain to talk of not having a creed, merely because it is not

reduced into the form of words and sentences bearing that name. The common law, which is unwritten, is more full and comprehensive than any statute, and it is no more requisite that a creed should be reduced into form, to be a creed, than a law to be a law: a strict examination would perhaps show us, that those sects who profess to have no creed, act at times with less lenity than others; not indeed, because they have none; but by reason of its not being defined, a greater latitude is given to judge of the doctrine of its members, and they are more liable to censure from being unacquainted with the particular test which their faith is to be subject to.

But though I have spoken thus plainly, I have no disposition to condemn societies, or contribute to their overthrow, if that were in my power: unregenerate men will find employment, and if societies were abolished their occupation would be no better. There are many who admire them, have great confidence in the good they may do; *they* will be disposed zealously to defend them, and will say, that laws to govern them are necessary, and that these have been given them by the spirit of Truth. I am not disposed to dispute all this, but if it be true,

they have been given because societies are not what they pretend to be, the church of Christ; the very existence of law, is a proof of it; for so truly as Christ comes, all laws are fulfilled and done away, not an outward Christ, but the power of God in the mind.

• Though I am most assuredly persuaded, that people may be righteous, without any kind of religious communities; yet if men were members of the true church, societies could exist without any shadow of creeds or discipline of any kind; the disciples of Jesus declared, that spirits were subject to them; and a state of perfect conformity to the Divine will, feels no offence; it is a state in which the worship of God is not interrupted, whether engaged in the common affairs of life which may rightly employ us, in meeting houses, or in other places.

It would indeed, be some argument in favor of particular sects, if faith and principles were communicated to sects and not to individuals; but the very reverse is the fact, men only know truth individually; and yet each one is expected to believe those doctrines which his sect acknowledge. Thus many make for themselves a verbal faith, which they no more truly believe in, than those who never heard of it. One man says he believes in the Trinity, another is a

predestinarian, when perhaps they do not know what the terms mean; a third pretends that war is unlawful, and that ordinances are wrong; and yet he may privately indulge in every species of war that is not open fighting, and be daily living and acting under ordinances.

Sects, as they now exist, tend to level all into one common mass—if members believe too little they are censured; if they believe too much, they are equally faulted; not because they are not believing, what in righteousness they only can believe; but because their faith does not correspond to that standard which has been set up to judge them by: and this levelling business is going on as fast as the work is accomplished which the different sects are so ardently engaged in—of propagating their respective forms of religion. They are building meeting houses, and locating worship, but do they not set up altars, as the Athenians did formerly, “to the unknown God.” Most truly I believe, that if it were not for the righteousness of those individuals among them, who have, in fact, their confidence placed upon better promises, there would hardly remain the shadow of true religion among them.

Perhaps I shall be met by those who may say, that in circulating the Bible, building up

societies, establishing creeds, and erecting meeting houses, they are acting from the best knowledge they have of right. To these I answer, I have no feeling that would condemn ; I should, by so doing, be attempting to withhold that liberty of conscience, which is the right of all. But let them query whence they got their notions of religion ? if they believe that irreligion is in their own selfish natures, I would ask them what lust, or passion, or appetite is overcome thereby ? do they covet riches less ? are they less easily excited to anger ? or less given to excess in eating or drinking ? if making creeds to bind the consciences of their fellow creatures, or building meeting houses, does overcome their passions, which they themselves confess, to be the man of sin ; then indeed there might be some show of truth in their remarks ; but on the contrary, do we not see, that those who are the most zealous actors herein, have their lusts and passions as easily excited as other men. Some of them may, as I have said of preachers, pay so much homage to their profession, as to endeavour to regulate their feelings by that—their reputation among men is at stake ; thus the stronger selfish feeling casts out that which is weaker.

But they plead that their exertions may do good to others.

The same causes operate upon all, none ever have their natural propensities overcome by reading the Bible or by attending meetings, or subscribing to creeds; if it were so then we should find, that all who practice these things are more pure and righteous than others who take no part therein; which is believed not to be the case. There are thousands of men who are members of no sect; will any one presume to say, that they are more sinful, than as many taken promiscuously, from among those who are in religious communities? will they give less credit to their words? or trust them less in their dealings? is not the query rather, whether they are honest men, than members of sects. And yet with the full knowledge of these facts, men continue to act upon sectarian views! The Divine light in their souls would perhaps show them that they have drawn their principles from books and from men; for priest-craft is so deeply rooted, that it is difficult to avoid or detect its influence.

If a man is supposed to be seriously inclined, he is met by sectarians in every stage of his progress, recommending him to men and to books; and he receives truth tinged with those

peculiarities which mark each; and which, if they are true to those who speak or write, may not be in any degree adapted to his own state. He is led into the ordinances which those are in, who direct him: "according to their pasture, so were they filled," Hosea xiii. c. 6 v. and this priest-craft is continued from one generation to another, and forms a phalanx, which few resist. It is much easier to float with the current than oppose it, much easier to observe the forms of religion, than to purify the heart—to read the Bible—to count beads—to be baptised or to put on a simple dress; than to accomplish that hardest of all work, sacrifice our own self-love. Thus we easily perceive why idolatry so much abounds in every country; and that those who look at the idols, are taught as they teach.

There is something naturally pleasing in the idea of doing good; and without considering that there is none good but *One*, and that there is nothing good but what proceeds from *Him*, they do what they choose to consider good, and then call it righteousness—look first to the creatures and then to God.

In critical reflections by certain Jews, or some of the works of Voltaire, is the following sentiments;—"The Patriarchs, the Priests, the ancient Jews, offered up lambs, sheep, and

bulls, the modern Jews offer up on the altar of their faith, much more costly victims ; self-love, that precious incense, so hardly surrendered by vanity ; posts, employments, those shortest and most effectual means, of laying up riches and of acquiring consequence in the world !” Many of the sacrifices of modern time may be compared to those of the ancient Jews, and though men profess now to be in the gospel dispensation, yet the one is no more effectual towards establishing true righteousness than the other.

People seem to believe that much can be accomplished in reforming other men, and they are willing to sacrifice their lives and fortunes in the attempt : “ It is not rare” says the grandson of Confucius, “ to see men who despise sickness, refuse dignities, and brave death, but alas ! it is difficult to find those, who know how to distinguish exactly the just medium, and to follow it.”

The more the efforts called religious are examined into, the more perhaps it will be seen, that they have originated in saving alive that which ought to die. If men could see the state of their own hearts, they would find a vineyard there, large enough to work in ; without attending so much to reform other men, or to

those deadly forms, which have no true connexion with religion.

The celebrated Rammohun Roy, whose work on the Monitheistical system of the Hindoos, I have already quoted; in another work printed at Calcutta, in 1820, says, that the missionaries of Hindostan know, as well as himself, that it is in consequence of the mysterious dogmas of the religion which they inculcate: "that notwithstanding every exertion on their part, I am not aware that we can find a single respectable Mussulman or Hindoo, who were not in want of the common comforts of life, once glorified with the truth of Christianity, constantly adhering to it. Of the few hundred natives who have been nominally converted to Christianity, and who have been generally of the most ignorant class, there is ground to suspect, that the greater number have been allured to change their faith by other attractions, than by a conviction of the truth and reasonableness of those dogmas; as we find nearly all of them, are employed or fed, by their spiritual teachers; and in case of neglect are apt to manifest a rebellious spirit."\* And in a third treatise he quotes the following, from a work written in favour of the Hindoo worship. "If by the prescribed

\* Page 20 and 21. Defence of Precepts of Jesus.

forms, in a church, a temple or a mosque, God be worshipped, how can he be dishonored, by being worshipped under the form of an image however manufactured?" and from the Shastres, treating of God, the following words.—  
 "Acts and rites, that originate in movements of the hands, and other members of the body, being perishable, cannot effect beatitude, that is eternal."

"Those that worship forms under appellations, continue subject to form and appellation: for no perishable means can effect the acquisition of an imperishable end."

"That man, who considers the Being that is infinite, incomprehensible, pure, extended as far as space, and time, and vacuity; to be finite, perceptible by the senses, limited by time and place, subject to passion and anger; what crime is such a robber of Divine Majesty not guilty of?"\*

Let the missionaries of each sect continue to preach and sectarians to labour, I have no wish to disturb them therein, but perhaps most of them will find, that their self-love stands in the way of that light which would show them the total inconsistency of many of their works with true religion. But they are afraid of the conse-

\* Page 36.

quences of trusting to the Light of God in their own souls in its simplicity ; they fear the overthrow of those idols which they love more than the truth,—their sects—their order—their forms and ceremonies—the desire of doing what they call good ; and of making converts to religion. Ah! say they, if only *one soul* should be converted, then indeed should I find a glorious reward for my labours !

Let not men suppose that their views of religion can be pure, when the slightest examination would show them, that they are *really* looking to God through those mediums which tradition has handed down to them, and *their* views and practices in religion correspond therewith ; as I have said before, this is an easy kind of religion ; and it will perhaps be found, that those in each sect, who are the most zealous and active in building up their own forms, and particular order, are so far from being the purest worshippers, as to be, instead thereof, the greatest idolators. Let them go on with their labours ; the mind which is pure, can neither be offended nor disturbed thereat ; it knows that though they are wholly inconsistent with pure and undefiled religion, yet that they are perfectly consistent with themselves ; and as Divine justice has made men free agents, a

wish or desire that would stop them, would be like a wish to stop the motion of the universe.

If any advance is made in righteousness, it must be by individuals breaking through those trammels that encircle them, sacrificing forms, which as soon as they have been established, have become idols in every sect; and no longer believing that their Creator has delegated to other men, in no respect better than themselves, the right to direct what their faith and practice shall be in his Divine sight; this will lead them from men to God; and they will feel and know that his power is sufficient for them, without being members of sects, or leaning upon the foundations of other men; and without religious forms of any kind. This will lead them from all the uncertain standards without them, to that universal principle within them, which has been testified of in all countries and ages, and which, however clouded by the devices of men, is perfect in its operations, and contains in itself alone, that which can satisfy the soul. In it is the sabbath of rest, in which nothing can disturb or destroy. Wherein the mind, centered in calmness, may see the sectarian pursue his task, or the drunkard his gambols, and may trace the selfish principle in its various operations without being offended; ful-

ly knowing that there is no natural evil, but that in this one selfish principle all evil has its existence; and that it is perfectly consistent with the Divine will, that it should operate, and that men should choose whom they will serve, God or Baal.

This sabbath is the rest appointed for the people of God. It is alike unknown to those who are anxious for the welfare of sects—for the promotion of religion—for the increase of science, or for the accumulation of wealth; anxiety is its antipode; as one lives the other dies; the perfection of this rest is not fully entered into, till by a conformity of man's will to the Divine will, that state is experienced which Jesus Christ spoke of. "Henceforth all power is given to me both in Heaven and in earth;" yet men enter into it by degrees; whenever one single sin is removed from us, whenever our will is wholly given up in one thing, we enter into rest as respects that thing, and are so far entered into the kingdom of Heaven,—here is a touchstone by which men may examine themselves, when they are preaching, or circulating Bibles, or supporting the ordinances of their sects; if desire, or fear, or anxiety is alive in them; if any thing interrupts the tranquillity of their minds, then in-

deed have they not entered into their Heavenly Father's rest. As it is attained by operations in individual minds, independent of societies; their dogmas and forms are so far from opening the road to it, that as they are depended upon, they tend to obstruct it.

This is the rest, that man naturally seeks after, but as he seeks it in lower objects, he is constantly disappointed; ask the votaries of the sciences and the arts, whether they have therein found rest? ask each lust and appetite, that has been gratified by its full enjoyment, whether there is any rest therein? the answer will be no! The pursuits which engage the attention of every class of men, from the king to the beggar, as they are in earthly things equally fail in yielding it.

We may traverse the world in pursuit of knowledge, explore every country, penetrate into the bowels of the earth, or measure the planets; and be further from finding rest, than the moment we set out. Still the ignis fatuus is pursued; still it eludes our grasp, there is yet some darling object before us, which when it is obtained, yields perhaps no more happiness than each one that preceded it. This is a picture of the life of a majority of men, spent in an unsuccessful pursuit of happiness, because

they seek it where it never can be found. It is just as it should be, it never was designed that men should find rest, but in the principle of truth itself, and this is alike within the reach of every individual. We may give this principle names which other men do not understand, and dispute about them. Many turn away at the idea of revelation, being unwilling to believe themselves the subjects of it. Some can easily speak of an omnipresent God ; their catechism or creed has taught them the term, but they do not appear to realize its truth : a God omnipresent to whom they are always accountable, and who looks on unconcerned, and sees them commit sin for which he is about to punish them, is an inconsistency which they can more easily realize, than that they are the subjects of revelation. Are such ideas consistent with the most common justice, which men would exercise towards their fellow-men, that they should have the power and intention to punish them for doing wrong, be present and see them err, and yet not inform them of it ;—can we believe this of a merciful Creator ?

By whatever name this principle of truth may be called, I view it entirely as the revelation of God upon the mind of man, operating continually and universally, it is this which preserves

the degree of harmony we witness, ten thousand times more than all the laws, that ever did or ever can exist; it operates upon all, and every true principle of honesty and justice is attributable to this revelation which has shown it to men though they have never read the Bible, or heard a sermon—Those who pronounce the punishment of the laws upon robbers or murderers, probably seldom ask them, whether they have read the Bible, or been told that such things were wrong; they appeal to their own feelings, in the certain knowledge, that they knew it independent of any outward circumstances. Every act of attention or obedience to this revelation is an advance on the road to Heaven.

But as the feelings of men are prejudiced by priest-craft in its various devices, they are also liable to be carried off by the flights of imagination: after being allured for a period of years, by every syren voice that has called; can it be imagined that the whisperings of the true Shepherd shall always be distinctly recognized. But poor frail man, so liable to err himself and yet so ready to judge others; pretends to deny that there is a true voice, because people sometimes mistake it; and even so greatly magnify the errors which may arise from this cause, as

to suppose every evil in religion is in their train. Let him look to himself, to that deadly formality—that idolatry—that selfishness, which he may witness among those he may call Christians—let him look to the wars, murders and bloodshed—to the fire and gibbets—to the dungeons of the Inquisition—to the persecutions of various kinds, which have sprung from written rules in religion, and will he not pause before he condemns? will his eyes be so far jaundiced, as not to see the one, while they are open to the other? will he continue to trust rather to these rules, which are often so destructive to the buddings of true religion, and to his own feeble efforts to correct the aberrations of fancy, than to the power of God in the soul.

From these excentricities there is nothing to fear, the calm operations of “unbiassed reason,” may be more safely trusted to correct them, than any force that can be applied. The Anabaptists of Germany met the most cruel deaths with heroic firmness, neither the sword, nor the flames that were kindled upon them, turned them from that fanaticism and enthusiasm, which yet yielded to the operations of principle within themselves.

From the efforts of imagination errors may

spring ; men, whose minds are enlightened to see the formality and idolatry that exists, naturally begin to think of reformation ; but the bigotry that would reform, by other means than those of conviction, is alike in all cases, whether it proceeds from an effort to regulate men by creeds, or by feelings in the mind distinct from them, it is still some standard which may not be true to others.

The Anabaptists, and Crusaders to recover the Holy land, as it is called, were actuated by similar motives, they both undertook to overcome infidelity by force, each were alike zealous, and their efforts equally failed. The latter cost Europe hundreds of thousands of lives, and every kind of enormity was tolerated, in the hope of establishing Christ's kingdom upon earth.

If we were to reason from these things, we should conclude, that there was no true religion in the world ; but here we are met by internal conviction, which tells us of its reality, and the conclusion is not to be drawn that there is no standard of truth in the mind, because men sometimes act under their own natural feelings, who profess a belief in it. Are we to doubt it when there are so many instances of men of every age, whose virtue has been so

conspicuous under its operations; and above all, when every feeling within us bears testimony to the truth of it.

“ Can storms or tempests quench the eye of day.”

So tenacious is priest-craft of the hold it has upon men, that we often find a disposition to impute error to particular persons, when the real difficulty has been, an extension of views, beyond those with whom they were associated; thus persons who in after-times have been considered saints, were martyrs to the popular opinions of the day; and died in the full confidence of truths, which it was reserved for after-ages to appreciate and acknowledge; and yet in the present, as in generations which are passed, there are those who call every man an innovator, and fancy danger from his doctrines, who pursues the course that those whom they themselves revere of former ages have done before him.

The pious man will look calmly on errors of every kind, as his mind is stayed in a confidence on God, he will be at peace amid every eccentricity, which may proceed from the flights of imagination on one hand, or the formality of sectarians on the other.

Some of my views may be considered subversive of all religion, and sectarians may take

pleasure in condemning them. Let them do so if they please : though but partially unfolded in these hasty sketches, they stand on a basis not easily moved ; and are written under feelings, which, while they would freely unmask the idolatry of sects, have no disposition to divert any man, from pursuing that course he may deem right in his conduct towards his God—whether it may lead him to condemn, or to approve—to build up priest-craft or pull it down.

It is not indeed by destroying priest-craft, that men are to be made better; that is more the effect than the cause of evil—the root is deeper than this, and so must be the remedy, but if it is consistent with the state the world is in, there is yet no reason why those who see its errors, should be united to societies who uphold it.

Individuals may rejoice that they themselves are free from the thralldom of sects, without judging how far it may be proper for others to be united to them.

I trust none will believe, that I have the most distant view of lessening true religion, it is not reasonable to suppose, that in taking away false coin, that which is genuine will either be of less value, or less sought after.

If the views I have taken, direct the mind

from superstition and tradition, they may tend to dispel those clouds which obstruct a clear perception of our duty to God; but even if this should be the case, nothing will be gained without practical piety.

Religion consists not in speculation but in reality; the man who is called a Deist or an Infidel, and who professes to follow nature, may have more real piety, than others, who may turn from him with abhorrence, at what they deem his infidelity; and this we must believe to be true; unless we realize, that a nominal belief, is of more consequence than works of peace and righteousness. Yet heresy and infidelity is imputed to the one, and not to the other.

There is but one remedy for every evil, and that is a daily dependance upon the power of Divine love in ourselves. This was the religion which was so divinely inculcated by Jesus Christ; this is the religion of my heart, to which every feeling responds.

It is not one, of dogmas and rituals, nor bounded by the narrow confines of sectarian prejudices, but one of universal benevolence and charity, which views all mankind as brethren, alike the subjects of Divine regard. It is a spiritual religion, existing in the mind;

and partaking of the Divine nature, assumes no form, but is known by its power, and manifested by its attributes of justice, mercy, and truth; breathing love to God, peace and good will to man. In it there is neither jarring, anarchy nor discord—having its life and centre in God it looks to his Divine light in the mind, as the only rule of conduct—as the only means of salvation from sin. It is a religion which comes home to the understanding and feelings of every man; which evening or morning he finds still in him; which all comprehend, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free—in it is a solace for what the world calls sorrow—a joy in the midst of afflictions; like the sun-beam, it enlightens our path, and cheers our way. It is a religion as universal and benevolent, as the spirit from which it proceeds, adapted to every varied state and condition—it is confined to no one day or place, more than another; in which no one sect has any advantage over the rest or above those who are members of none of them; it is a daily religion, in which the worship of God is performed by obedience to him, in spirit and in truth. And though the smallness of its operations is compared to a grain of mustard seed; yet while it descends to the lowest capacity, it encloses every thing that is good or great or ex-

cellent in the world. Its perfection is the sabbath of rest, in which man ceases from his labour, and enters through death into the kingdom of heaven—that death in which the lusts of man are as perfectly and completely dead as the corpse of the dead man that can be awoke no more; and into that heaven, which is no where, and yet every where, a union with the Father as unbounded as his love.

This death is the prelude to happiness, it is the death in which man should feel most interested—it is a death to his lusts—to every thought and feeling which could engender sin—This death is the portal of Eden, the Paradise of God, where there is no sorrow or crying, nor can there be any, for there is no fear, hope, desire, or anxiety—there is no temptation for that which could be tempted is dead—there is nothing to resign, the will of the creature existing no more. It is that state of perfection to which Jesus called his followers, when he said, “be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” It is a state of which my mind at times has so clear a prospect, that it can hardly be deceived therein—a state of holiness, in which regeneration is accomplished, and man becomes the child of God; in which the Divine will is done in all things, without any cross or

deviation—it is the state of Deification, spoken of by John Everard, about two centuries ago, in which we no longer act, but the power of God does all in us. “If we do any thing, yet we see, feel, and confess, it is God that doeth it; if we speak, it is Christ that speaks; if we think, it is Christ that thinks; if we go, it is Christ that goeth; it is no longer you that act any thing,” “it is Christ that liveth in you.”

And here I close, ascribing thanksgiving and praise, to that power which has shed its benign light upon my understanding, to see the purity, the excellency, the vitality of the Christian religion; and which power is alone worthy to rule and reign in the hearts of the children of men.

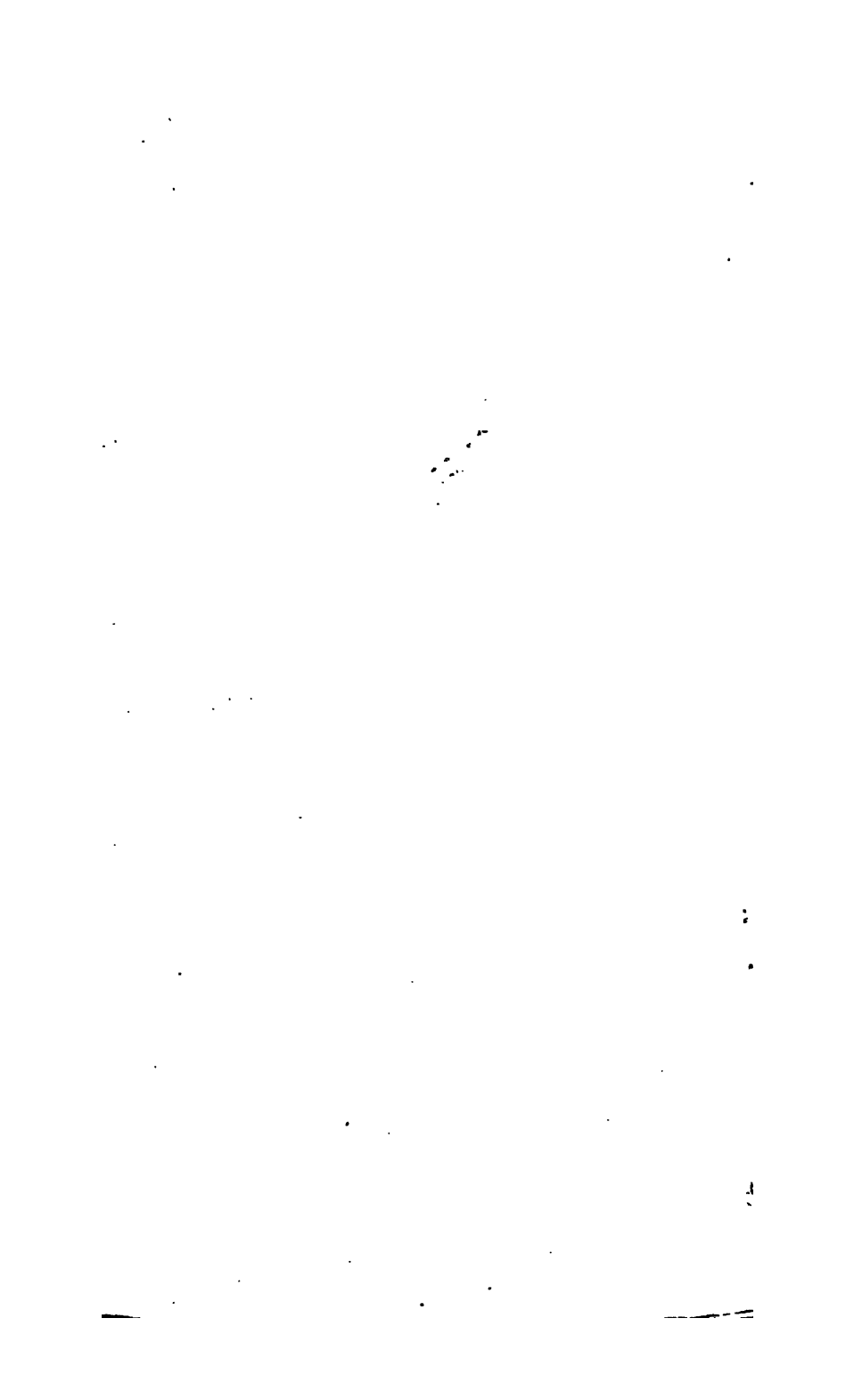
## ERRATA.

Circumstances prevented the author from reading over the proof sheets, till after a considerable part of the pages were printed off—a few errors have occurred, and some words became interpolated, which, as they were not in the original, and alter in some degree the sense, it is the more material to correct :

- Page 10, 11th line, for “ omnipotent ” read “ omnipresent.”
- 15, 27th line, insert “ they ” there eyes they have closed.
- 17, 8th line, for “ they,” read “ he.”
- 23, 9th line, for “ attendance,” read “ attention.”
- 24, 13th line, for “ his outward dispensation,” read “ him.”
- 24, 1st line, for “ ballances,” read “ balances.”
- 28, put inverted comma's to the paragraphs.
- 31, the same to the second and third paragraphs.
- 32, the same to the first, second and third paragraphs.
- 32, line 23, insert “ wise,” the wise man cannot be, &c.
- 35, 20th line, read “ such is the prevalency of priest-craft that it is denied.”
- 36, 9th line, omit “ primary.”
  - 10th line, for “ less,” read “ more.”
- 37, 3d line, omit “ independant.”
- 39, 22d line, for “ other men,” read “ those of other men.”
- 40, 4th line, for “ have,” read “ has.”
- 43, 10th line, for “ immortality,” read “ immutability.”
- 47, 12th line, for “ Pilot,” read “ Pilate.”
  - 22, 23, 24, omit the parenthesis.

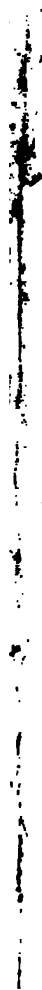


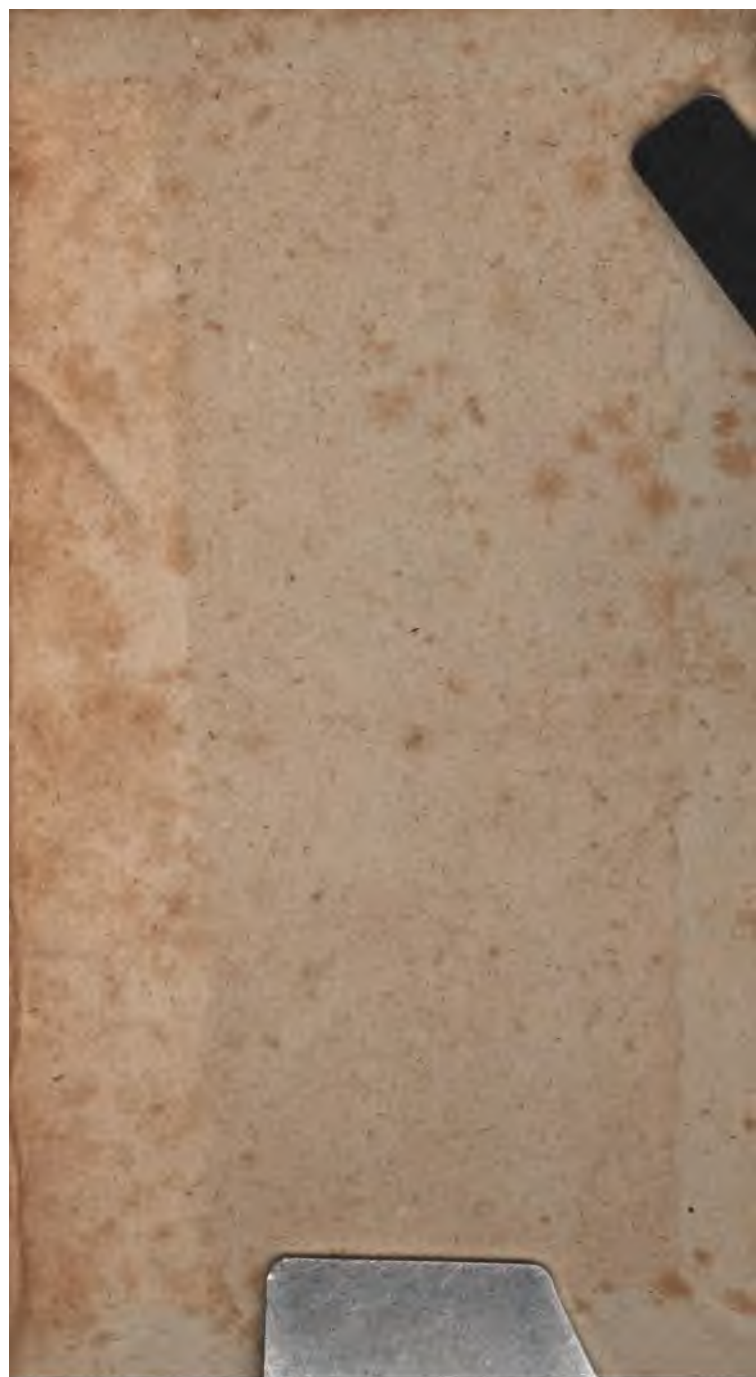












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